



COMBAT

Spring Offensive and Hundred Days 1918

German Soldier

VERSUS

British Soldier

Stephen Bull



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Illustrated by Adam Hook

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Company/Battery

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Platoon

••



Section

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Squad



Infantry



Artillery



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Airborne



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Air defence



Air Force



Air mobile



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Anti-tank



Armour



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Bridging



Engineer



Headquarters



Maintenance



Medical



Missile



Mountain



Navy



Nuclear, biological,
chemical



Ordnance



Parachute



Reconnaissance



Signal



Supply



Transport
movement

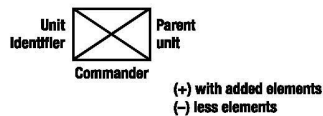


Fortress or
static



Fortress
machine gun

Key to unit identification



Introduction

In March 1918, the *Kaiserschlacht* – the ‘Kaiser’s Battle’ – transformed the situation on the Western Front, as Gefreiter ‘R’, a soldier of Germany’s 3. Garde-Infanterie-Division, recalled:

Before 5 am on 21 March our bombardment, gas, and smoke projection begins, a din in which one cannot understand a single word! The gas cloud is so thick visibility is reduced to three paces: tears in the eyes, nose and mouth run with water. About nine we leave the trench: our mortars had already been brought up to our wire during the night. We have 35 minutes to work up to the English position and here the trenches lie more than a kilometre [1,094yd] apart. Slowly we advance. In front of us our artillery peppers the ground forming a creeping barrage. The English are not firing, his batteries are silent – they are gassed. Observation of the English trenches is impossible, everything is thick with smoke. Precisely at 9.35 our artillery is in action again. Now we see the English trenches well, everything levelled! We storm ahead and the remnants of the trench garrison are overcome in a brief melee. (Quoted in Foerster 1929: 443)

By March 1918, World War I had changed virtually beyond all recognition. Important recent strategic developments included the United States’ entry into the war on the side of the Entente as an ‘associated power’ as of April 1917, and the collapse of Russia in late 1917. Peace was made between Bolshevik Russia and the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918, meaning that it proved possible to shift many German divisions (40, according to Ludendorff) from the Eastern Front to the West.



German assault troops crouch in a shallow trench as they await the order to attack, March 1918. Several riflemen have used a length of webbing looped around the back of the neck to support the waist belt and its heavy load of rifle ammunition. (NCJ/Topix/NCJ Archive/Mirrorpix via Getty Images)



Pictured on 21 January 1918, these British soldiers of The East Lancashire Regiment are entrenched near Givenchy, France. (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)

The entry of the United States into the war was due mainly to Germany's use of unrestricted submarine warfare, and meddling in Mexico. The US Army was small and as of early 1917, none of it was in Europe. Though the United States' entry into the war had no immediate impact on the battlefield, it did set an effective time limit on German freedom of action, because over the months American troops would arrive in numbers. That time limit had not arrived, however, even by the summer of 1918, and in the meantime the balance of forces on the Western Front shifted sharply in favour of Germany.

As of October 1917, the Entente armies on the Western Front had enjoyed a numerical advantage, with 176 divisions against 150 German. By March 1918, however, Germany had the advantage, with 192 divisions against 169. The forces facing the Germans now included 98 French and 57 British and British Empire divisions. The US Army in France had grown to just six divisions, and was as yet not fully trained. The shrinkage of the British and French formations was down to slow replacement and reorganization of existing strength to create a smaller number of relatively fit units. There were worries that more British and French divisions might have to be stood down,

and only the Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians were at full strength.

Recent research suggests that the shortage of British troops in early 1918 was mainly a function of new and long-winded mechanisms employed after the advent of conscription. Just as important from the perspective of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the Western Front, was that the War Cabinet agreed to extend the British front by taking over another 25 miles from the French. This southern British sector was hastily filled by General Hubert Gough's Fifth Army, with just 11 infantry divisions. The Entente strategic plan for 1918 was that the armies would roll with any major enemy offensive, then counter-attack.

With Kaiser Wilhelm II Germany's 'Supreme War Lord', and Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg Chief of the General Staff, much of the planning for Germany's 1918 spring campaign fell to Hindenburg's deputy, First Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff. Despite gaining ground in the East, the German Army had stood on the defensive in the West since the attritional battle of Verdun (21 February–18 December 1916), and now it appeared the war would be lost for Germany and its allies, sooner or later against superior numbers unless decisive action was taken.

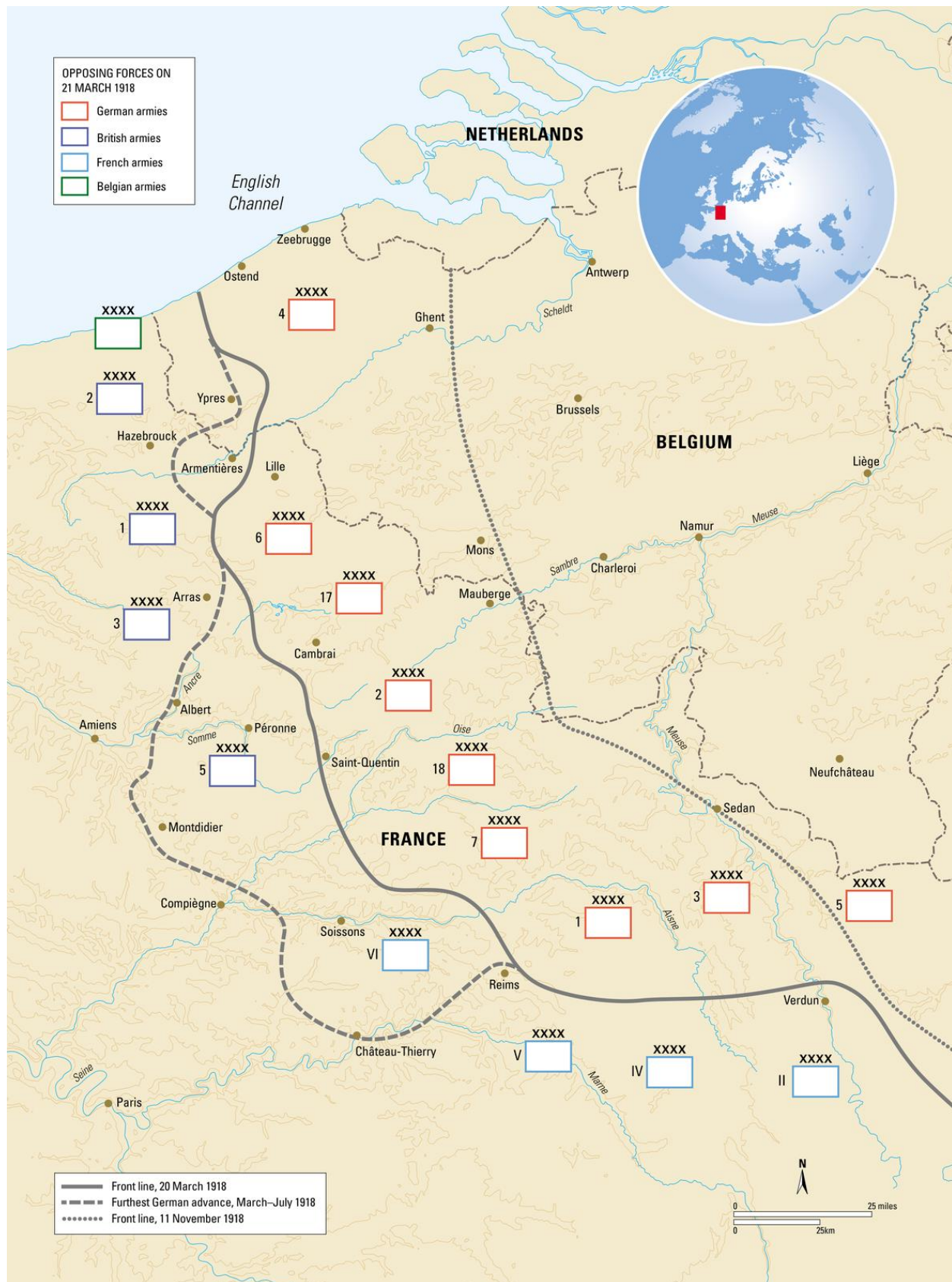
Western Front operations in 1918

This map illustrates the positions of the armies in northern France and Belgium just before the opening of Germany's March 1918 Spring Offensive, which aimed to separate the British and French before driving north towards the Channel.

While the initial *Michael* onslaught pushed the British back a greater distance than any previous effort, loss of ground did not cause either British or French collapse. Nevertheless Ludendorff continued with his attacking strategy, with Operation *Georgette* on the Lys River starting on 9 April. Again the defenders gave up ground, some of it deliberately, to free up troops. The *Blücher–Yorck* offensive, starting on 27 May, then struck the French army between Soissons and Reims. While the French VI Armée and British divisions supposedly at 'rest' in the area suffered significant loss, this thrust towards the Marne failed to take Paris. In Operation *Gneisenau*, commencing on 9 June, the Germans

belatedly attempted to build on previous advances against the British, but this attack was called off due to a French counter-stroke on 11 June.

Billed as a 'Peace offensive', Operation *Marneschutz–Reims* (commencing on 15 July) again targeted the French, but proved abortive when held in the forward zone. After this, with losses on both sides reaching critical levels, Ludendorff suffered a significant setback at Amiens, commencing with what Ludendorff dubbed the 'Black Day of the German Army' on 8 August. British, Canadian and Australian forces now headed the push towards the German border, with the now much-expanded AEF attacking to the south. The last 'Hundred Days' of the war had begun.



The decision to attack in the spring was made as early as 11 November 1917, during a conference at Mons in Belgium. Interestingly, this was not attended by either the Kaiser or Hindenburg, but Ludendorff played an important part alongside members of the General Staff, and chiefs of staff. While Germany could have chosen to attack elsewhere, it had been observed that Entente offensives in secondary theatres had not produced conclusive results, so the Western Front was chosen. Just as the Entente had decided to attack on the Somme in 1916, Ludendorff also chose to make his main thrust at the junction of the British and French armies in 1918, and curiously his original plan also looked something like Haig's intentions of two years previously. Three German armies would attack in Operation *Michael* against what was thought to be a weak sector near Saint-Quentin and break in to the enemy position before a major part of the German forces wheeled northwards towards Arras, and from thence push onward towards the Channel.

The weakest part of the plan for Germany's 1918 Spring Offensive was what would happen after an initial breakthrough, but while Ludendorff aimed at comprehensive defeat of the British Army exactly where German forces should aim for after breaking the defensive crust was uncertain. Ludendorff's strategy relied on an old maxim of the General Staff, that the 'chaos of war' would naturally present opportunities once the enemy was engaged. Generalleutnant Hermann J. von Kuhl, Rupprecht's chief of staff, favoured an attack in Flanders with the objective of severing rail communications; others suggested attacks either side of Verdun, as the French were still a significant threat; but while these and other plans were filed for possible use later in the year, Ludendorff remained wedded to aiming the onslaught at the southern part of the British front.

The Opposing Sides

ORIGINS AND RECRUITMENT

German

While some men were accepted as volunteers in 1914, as depicted by Erich M. Remarque in his novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (literally ‘Nothing New in the West’ in English but translated as *All Quiet on the Western Front*), the mass of German troops were conscripts, and conscription had existed in Prussia long before the Second German Empire came into existence in 1871. Following France’s defeat of Prussia at the twin battles of Jena and Auerstädt (14 October 1806), both conscription and the Prussian Army itself were reformed along the lines of new systems devised by military luminaries Gebhard von Blücher, Carl von Clausewitz, August von Gneisenau, Gerhard von Scharnhorst and Hermann von Boyen. According to the Military Service Law of 1888, men were liable for three years of active service, later reduced to two, plus a longer period as reservists.

Conscription was broadly accepted by the German populace, being taken as the price of citizenship of one of the newest, largest and most prosperous nations in Europe. Some German commentators even claimed conscription was better than voluntary enlistment on the grounds that it created a truly ‘national’ army – something they did not accept was the case with Britain and France, both of which made extensive use of colonial forces.

By the eve of war in 1914, the German conscription system involved registration of young men in their late teens, then *Musterung* (a calling together for medical examination and selections). Though liability for service commenced at 17 years of age and all males were considered a pool for the *Landsturm* and home defence at that age, men were not generally called to the colours until their twentieth year. The call-up process sifted out many youngsters at an early stage, and not just due to physical or mental

infirmities. Advanced as it was the German conscription system was not perfect, however, for while there were an increasing number of exemptions before 1914 the Army did not yet have sufficient units established to make use of all the conscripts. Moreover, exemptions to conscription remained, and became more complex as large numbers of men were needed for war industries.

As of 1913 the *Jahreklasse* ('year class') was composed of 1.3 million men, an increase on previous years due to the new expansionary law of 1912, but just 305,000 were taken for 'colour service' in the standing (or 'active') army. Some were rejected entirely for medical reasons, but others were conditionally 'mustered out' or discharged for family and economic reasons, such as being the breadwinner of a family. The *Restanten* (literally 'remains', i.e. those not taken immediately by the Army or Navy nor earmarked for the *Ersatz* (replacement) reserve or *Landsturm*) could be revisited in future years for re-examination.



Other ranks of Infanterie-Regiment 'König Ludwig III von Bayern' (3. Königlich Sächsisches) Nr. 102, showing full marching order and the Saxon uniform in use earlier in the war.

British Intelligence assumed about 500,000 men would swell the German Army every year, and in wartime practice the German Army borrowed against its future by calling up year classes earlier. While peacetime arrangements specified two years' active service with the infantry followed by four years in the reserve, 11 in the *Landwehr* and seven in the *Landsturm* with liability ending at the age of 45, men were likely to be funnelled where and when they were needed in war. Accordingly, the 1916 class was called up in late 1915 and the 1917 class in 1916, while those in the 1918 class found themselves in uniform during the winter of 1916/17.

The states of the German Empire provided men in proportion to population, so Prussia and its smaller satellites produced 78 per cent and the kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg produced 11, 7 and 4 per cent respectively. Local regimental bases were spread all over Germany and arranged in such a way that the 24 *Armeekorps* had regional identity, and at least one large *Truppenübungsplatz* (military training area), as for example VIII. Armeekorps at Elsenborn, III. Armeekorps at Jüterbog and I. Bayerisches Armeekorps at Lechfeld.

Infanterie-Regiment 158, in the front line of the Spring Offensive of 1918, was hugely experienced, but by no stretch of the imagination an elite, nor even particularly distinguished unit. The regiment was actually not very much older than Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener's 'New Army' of 1914. While some commentators have described the regiment as 'Westphalian' this is not strictly accurate, as although Westphalia was an old geographical term, the modern-day German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen (North Rhine-Westphalia) did not come into existence until 1949, and the official regimental title during World War I was Paderborner Infanterie-Regiment (7. Lothringisches) Nr. 158. Pre-existing infantry regiments numbered '13', '15', '53' and '55' did actually carry *Westfälisches* titles, and all were numbered in the sequence of Prussian infantry, as their home stations were in the area of the old Holy Roman Empire acquired by Prussia after 1815. The regiment was only created in April 1897, by taking the fourth battalion of the well-recruited Infanterie-Regiment 'Herwarth von Bittenfeld' (1. Westfälisches) Nr. 13 and elements of Infanterie-Regimenter Nr. 53, Nr. 55 and Nr. 15, to create the new two-battalion Infanterie-Regiment 158. Its

celebratory ‘foundation day’ was fixed as 31 March 1899, while the regimental title was confirmed in 1902.

COMBAT

Unteroffizier,
Infanterie-Regiment
Nr. 158

Manchester Hill, 21
March 1918



Depicted in the opening hours of the Spring Offensive, this NCO of 'shock troops' has eschewed a rifle, instead being armed with a 9mm P 08 'Luger' pistol and multiple stick grenades.



Weapons, dress and equipment

Easy to point and quick to discharge, the 'Luger' pistol (1) offered fair stopping power, but could be temperamental under muddy conditions. He carries a *Stielhandgranate* (2), a key infantry weapon widely issued from 1915.

His steel helmet (3) is camouflaged in a sacking cover. He wears the 1915-type fly-fronted *Bluse* (4); the shoulder straps (5) display the regimental numerals and the green collar (6) has an edging of silver-coloured lace, the rank insignia of the *Unteroffizier*. He also wears corduroy trousers (7) with leather knee-patches, puttees (8) and black ankle boots (9).

The pistol holster (10) on his waist belt is worn alongside wire cutters (11). A bread bag (12) with a water bottle attached (13) are carried at his rear right. His gas mask (14) is carried in the ready position, while its cylinder (15) is suspended under his left arm by a narrow strap. Carried on shoulder straps concealed by the grenade bags (16) worn under both arms, his *Sturmgepäck* (assault equipment) consists of a mess tin (17) around which is wrapped a rolled shelter-quarter (18) secured with straps.



The *Ritterkreuz* of the *Militärverdienstorden* (Military Service Order), a military order of the Kingdom of Württemberg. Among its recipients were not only senior commanders such as

Ludendorff, but also officers such as Erwin Rommel and Manfred von Richthofen. Many such distinctions and traditions, from terminology to details of uniforms and insignia, were observed across the various parts of the German Army. (INTERFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo)

Not until 1913 was IR 158 brought up to full three-battalion strength, and again the old Westphalian regiments were called upon to furnish manpower: IR 13 provided the ninth company, IR 15 the tenth, IR 55 the eleventh and IR 53 the twelfth. The initial home station was Sennelager, which was very practical as the capacious Sennelager camp had been in use since 1851 as a Prussian cavalry training area. Especially convenient was the railway station at Schloss Neuhaus, and the proximity of Paderborn itself, just 5km (3 miles) away. As of August 1914, IR 158 was part of the 13. Infanterie-Division alongside its old comrades IR 13, IR 15 and IR 55.

The 13. Infanterie-Division was part of the VII Armeekorps and soon active on the outbreak of war. IR 158 was engaged in the Grenzschlachten (Battle of the Frontiers, 7 August–6 September) in 1914, and by curious coincidence fought at Saint-Quentin in late August, as well as in Belgium and on the Marne River, entrenching near Arras in October. The 13. Infanterie-Division fought against the British at the battles of Neuve Chapelle (10–13 March) and Festubert (10–15 May) in 1915, but IR 158 missed the latter engagement because it was detached and transferred to the 50. Infanterie-Division, a new ‘triangular’ formation with three, rather than four, infantry regiments, commanded by Generalleutnant George von Engelbrechten from 1915 to mid-1918. IR 158’s casualty rate, modest until October 1914, now shot up dramatically.

Fighting the French in the Tahure sector, the 50. Infanterie-Division suffered 8,000 casualties, many of whom fell on IR 158: over 600 dead, and at least two battalion commanders, three medical officers, three officers ranking as *Hauptmann* and two-dozen ranking as *Oberleutnant* or *Leutnant* among the casualties. A regimental order of battle for September 1915 shows IR 158 now operating under command of Major Karl von Klitzing as four battalions. Three were apparently ordinary infantry battalions, III./IR 158 being commanded by a *Hauptmann* Kaiser (almost certainly Alexander Kaiser, author of the regimental history). The fourth *Tactisches* (tactical) battalion contained the machine-gun, *Pionier* and *Minenwerfer* companies, with a bicycle company, medical detachment and other specialists attached.

After rest and refit, the 50. Infanterie-Division returned to the front line, fighting at the battle of Verdun (21 February–18 December 1916), where IR

158 (now under Major Kühl), was instrumental in the taking of Fort Vaux in early June. Counter-attacked by the French, the regiment again suffered heavy losses in August, but then moved with its parent division to the Argonne and was attacked again by the French before being pulled out of the line for rest. Following further action on the Chemin des Dames in October 1917, the 50. Infanterie-Division was withdrawn and over the winter of 1917/18 rested, rebuilt and trained in the vicinity of Chimay, Belgium. In mid-March 1918 it moved forward to the front in readiness for the attack west of Saint-Quentin.



Heavily laden but cheerful German soldiers in a shell-damaged village, 1918. The MG 08/15 gunner wears his gas-mask container on his chest for ready access. (The Print Collector/Heritage Images via Getty Images)



Members of a German infantry *Gruppe* (section) gather around their *Unteroffizier* in a front-line trench. The man standing on the left has a *Mehrlader* 20-round magazine fitted to his Gew 98 rifle.

The two German divisions in combat at Moreuil Wood and Rifle Wood were distinctly different in character, for one was from Saxony, the other from Württemberg. The 23. Infanterie-Division, a Saxon formation, was first raised as early as 1867. While US Intelligence took a dim view of the division by 1918, it included *Leib Grenadier*, *Schützen* (rifle) and Grenadier regiments and performed reasonably well. The 243. Infanterie-Division actually started life as the 8. Ersatz-Division, a ‘replacement’ formation made up of *Ersatz* companies and regiments, arranged in ‘mixed’ brigades. Nevertheless, the division fought well enough in the early phases of the war, mainly in Lorraine. Following various reforms and exchanges of units, the 8. Ersatz-Division emerged as two *Ersatz* brigades of three regiments each. After shedding Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 400 for service in Russia, the division was renamed the 243. (Württembergische) Infanterie-Division in April 1917. Action in the Verdun area caused heavy losses, falling particularly hard on the old and distinguished Füsiliier-Regiment ‘Kaiser Franz Josef von Österreich, König von Ungarn’ (4. Württemberg) Nr. 122. After this battle, US Intelligence assessments would describe the division only as ‘mediocre’ (General Staff US Army 1919: 745).

The Großherzoglich Hessische (25.) Infanterie-Division was raised in the Darmstadt area and traced its roots back to the Hessian army of old. Initially

forming part of the 4. Armee, it crossed the border into Belgium via Luxembourg in mid-August 1914. Thereafter it was engaged on the Marne and other sectors of the Western Front for the next three years, fighting on the Somme and at Verdun and Ypres. Heavy losses were repeatedly replaced after combat, notably in September 1916 when 2,700 men from the *Landsturm* and youngsters of the 1917 class arrived. Despite this, Intelligence assessments of 1917 still graded the 25. Infanterie-Division as ‘very good’, with seemingly ‘high’ morale on the eve of the 1918 Spring Offensive (General Staff US Army 1919: 353–54). The assessments were perhaps bolstered by the fact that the division contained some of Germany’s very best infantry regiments.

British

For the first 16 months of the war, enlistment in the British Army remained entirely voluntary. To the small pre-war professional force were added waves of volunteers filling up the ranks of line regiments and Territorials, as well as Kitchener’s ‘New Army’, which formed ‘Service’ battalions for existing regiments, and brought into being whole new divisions of essentially ‘citizen’ soldiers. For a while volunteers proved sufficient, with the authorities having only to tighten or slacken the flow of recruits by means of adjusting age, height or other requirements to accelerate or slow numbers passing through recruiting stations.

One of the early ‘citizen soldier’ units of ‘Pals’ was 16th Battalion (1st City), The Manchester Regiment. Starting with a newspaper advert in August 1914, many recruits came forward from large firms, with men put into platoons alongside workmates wherever possible. Ex-regular NCOs trained the men, while the regimental sergeant major (RSM, known colloquially as ‘the stick’) briefed young officers. In late April 1915, 16th Manchester proceeded to Lincolnshire where its troops dug practice trenches at Harlaxton Park, shot on ranges, changed to khaki uniforms, paraded and practised attack. Larkhill on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, provided the ‘last lap’ for training with ‘field firing’ before the battalion joined 30th (New Army) Division alongside other Manchester and Liverpool units, arriving in France in November 1915 and taking over a sector of the Western Front in January 1916.

Their duty on the Western Front was much the same as any of the other units engaged in trench warfare: in and out of the line at intervals, shelled, sniped and losing a trickle of men as they struggled to keep defences in order

and the Germans out. On the first day of the battle of the Somme (1 July–18 November 1916), 30th Division attacked on the right flank of Fourth Army, performing better than many others, advancing further than most, optimistic and fighting well, then using Lewis guns and rifle fire to fend off German counter-attacks. Heavy losses included all the officers of A Coy and B Coy killed or wounded, Captain Wilfrith Elstob leading D Coy being slightly injured but remaining at his post. Fighting on the Somme as part of Lieutenant-General Sir Walter N. Congreve's XIII Corps, 16th Manchester found that this promising start slowed as 30th Division faced fresh lines of German defences over the following month.

By late July, 30th Division found itself pushed up against the ruins of Guillemont, and each advance met diminishing returns. On 30 July, a repeat attack on Guillemont went disastrously wrong, with 16th Manchester advancing into fog, losing direction and being shelled and machine-gunned from both sides; the battalion war diary entry for that day recorded 17 killed, 97 wounded and 97 missing. Yet many of those 'missing' were actually dead, or subsequently died of their wounds. Probably there would have been even more fatalities had the battalion not 'broken' quite so quickly and streamed rapidly back toward British lines.

The next day, 16th Manchester was withdrawn to spend August 1916 'cleaning up', training and providing working parties for First Army around Amiens. Now with Lieutenant-Colonel Elstob in command, the battalion fought again at the Third Battle of Ypres (31 July–10 November 1917) at the end of July, performing well and taking prisoners, despite having another 262 officers and men killed, wounded or missing from its own ranks. Further trench warfare followed. As a result, 16th Manchester needed fresh drafts and training before what the City Battalions' history called the 'Second Battle of the Somme' in 1918 (Regimental Committee 1923: 43).



A soldier of The East Lancashire Regiment. His regimental cap badge shows the sphinx over a rose, under the crown: the sphinx commemorated regimental service in Egypt and the rose was a reference to the Red Rose of Lancashire. (The Palmer Archive/Alamy Stock Photo)

Representing a different, pre-war tradition, 5th Battalion, The East Lancashire Regiment, was a Territorial battalion of the general type instituted during the Army reforms of 1908 as a result of the conversion of earlier 'Volunteer battalions'. The battalion was embodied in Burnley on the outbreak of war as part of the Territorial East Lancashire Brigade, with individual companies sourced from Burnley (A), Burnley and Padiham (B), Burnley (C and D), Accrington (F), Haslingden and Ramsbottom (G) and Bacup (H). Quickly moved abroad, the battalion landed in Egypt in September 1914, and fought in the Gallipoli campaign from May 1915 to January 1916. It moved to France in 1917, becoming part of 66th Division, and was thus well experienced by the time of the *Kaiserschlacht* the next year.

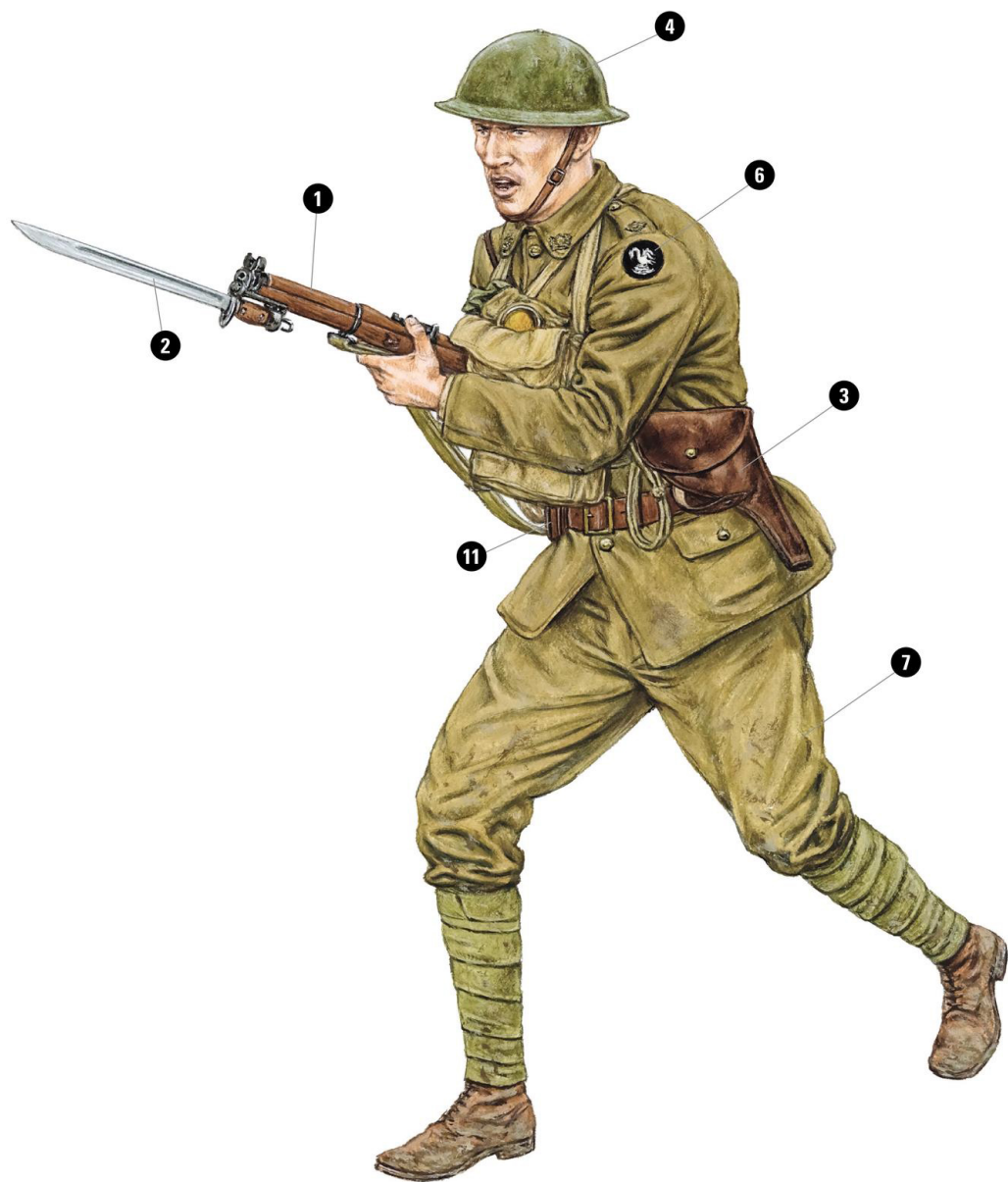
The 20th Hussars were not infantry of any description, and while British cavalry of the early 20th century enjoyed something of a cachet, it cannot be pretended that the regiment stood at the apex of that elite pyramid. Stationed

at Colchester from 1911 until the outbreak of war, the 20th Hussars formed part of 5th Cavalry Brigade, together with 12th (Prince of Wales's Royal) Lancers and 2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys), and received orders for mobilization on 4 August 1914. After topping up with reservists the regiment left for the Continent on 16 August, led by its commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Graham T.G. Edwards and organized as three squadrons, each of four troops. The second-in-command was Major George T.-R. Cook, and the Adjutant was Captain G.A. Sanford. Signals officer Captain John C. Darling was subsequently addressed by Brigadier-General Sir Philip W. Chetwode, GOC 5th Cavalry Brigade, as 'my dear Darling'. Yet while Darling may well have been the inspiration for future television comedy he was nobody's fool, and it is through his regimental history, *20th Hussars in the Great War*, that we learn much about the engagement at Rifle Wood on 1 April 1918.

COMBAT

Second lieutenant,
16th Manchester

Manchester Hill, 21
March 1918



Like many junior officers, this subaltern has gone into action carrying a rifle, giving him a better range in combat, and making him appear less obviously an officer.



Weapons, dress and equipment

This officer's main weapon is a .303in SMLE Mk III rifle (1) with Pattern 1907 bayonet (2) affixed. He also carries a .455in Webley Mk VI revolver (3), attached to a lanyard around his neck and holstered on his left side so as to be drawn across with the right hand.

He wears a steel helmet (4). Intended to make the officer wearing it indistinguishable from 'other ranks' at a distance his 'wind up' jacket (5) is an issue khaki service dress (SD) garment bearing just a single 'pip' on each shoulder, regimental 'collar dogs' and 30th Division upper-arm insignia (6). The jacket is worn with SD trousers (7), puttees (8) and ankle boots (9).

His personal equipment includes a leather waist belt (10) and small pistol-ammunition pouch (11), plus a rifle-ammunition bandolier (12) over his left shoulder. He also carries a carrot-shaped 'private purchase' flask (13), examples of which appear in various regimental museum collections.



The badge of the 20th Hussars was 'XX' and an 'H' under the crown, while the nickname was 'Nobody's Own', a remark based on the lack of a royal or aristocratic patron, or even a definite regional association. A 20th Inniskilling Light Dragoons had been raised as early as 1759, but this unit was disbanded and only resurrected spasmodically over the next century, with the 20th Hussars of 1914–18 tracing its lineage via the East India Company and the 2nd Bengal European Light Cavalry, which transferred to the British Army, then converted to hussars in 1861. The 20th Hussars fought in the Sudan (1885–90), and in the latter stages of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), where the regiment faced Boers using what might best be described as modern 'dragoon tactics', riding to battle and dismounting to fight. Perhaps as a consequence British cavalry, including the 20th Hussars, discarded their carbines and were

re-armed with SMLE rifles soon after the Second Anglo-Boer War, and were trained in the rudiments of dismounted combat before 1914. (M. Palmer/Alamy Stock Photo)

The 20th Hussars had an active time on the Western Front from the outset, with multiple patrols engaging German cavalry as early as 0800hrs on 22 August 1914. The 20th Hussars performed well, protecting the flank of the BEF at Mons and elsewhere, as well as maintaining liaison with the French and performing reconnaissance. In doing so the regiment suffered about 50 fatalities during 1914. These were all other ranks and NCOs, though one has the impression that the officers were not only 'leading from the front', but taking less-than-prudent risks in doing so.

As early as 1915, it became clear that British casualties were mounting and the war would be long. While the British government was not as yet prepared to face the political risks of conscription many influential men, including Kitchener, saw its advent only as a question of timing and extent. A serious obstacle to any form of compulsion was that the British government lacked an accurate idea of how many men there were of suitable age and not exempted by employment. Putting this to rights started in July 1915 with the National Registration Act, leading to commencement of a National Register the next month. This attempted to record the personal details, employment and work skills of all males and females between the ages of 15 and 65; a herculean task that required the Registrar General to act under the Local Government Board. In the autumn of 1915 came the 'Derby Scheme', another goad to the reluctant. Under the auspices of Edward G.V. Stanley, 17th Earl of Derby, the new 'Director General of Recruiting', men aged 18–41 were registered afresh. The Derby Scheme attracted over 300,000 men, a figure that was far from draining the well of potential troops.

Compulsion came only in January 1916 with the passing of the first Military Service Act, at which time 'every male British subject' who had reached the age of 18, was not yet 41, and unmarried or a widower without children, became liable to serve. Individuals could attend a tribunal to avoid service on various grounds including specific employments, poor health or conscientious objection. Failure to convince the tribunal was not the end of the process, however, as an appeal could be made. As a result of a successful appeal a man might receive a certificate of exemption, but eligible men who refused to serve could face penalties, up to and including death. In May 1916, conscription was extended to married men, and in 1917 the Convention with

Allied States allowed British subjects residing abroad, and Allied nationals living in Britain, to be conscripted on a reciprocal basis; a Ministry of National Service was created in November 1917. The Military Service Act was updated again in February 1918, when the upper age limit for conscription reached a surprising 50 at recruitment, with a general limit of 56 years old. The Ministry of National Service also set a new scale of fitness grading in which I denoted 'fit for general service', II 'likely to improve with training', III 'fit only for labouring or sedentary duty' and IV 'permanently unfit'.

As British politicians had suspected, conscription met with significant opposition. While 1.1 million men were enlisted in the first year, significant numbers failed to respond, and conscription was not extended to Ireland. In the end conscription netted 2.5 million men during the war and was not abolished until 1920. The work of Alison Hine (2018: 156–70) has cast doubt on the commonly reflected view of British High Command that replacements were deliberately held back in Britain during 1918 by Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Hine observed no specific order to hold troops from crossing the Channel, nor any correspondence suggesting an informal understanding to that effect. There was, however, an indubitable shortage of replacements, particularly for the infantry and from the latter part of 1917 onward. This can be attributed to a number of causes: first, and most importantly, the high casualties at the battle of Arras (9 April–16 May) and during the Third Battle of Ypres; second, failings in the recently developed system of conscription; and third, the holding of a 'home reserve' at the behest of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General William R. Robertson. Lastly came the demand to send troops to Italy, which absorbed 11 Entente divisions at the end of 1917.



A British cavalry corporal turns his Hotchkiss light machine gun skyward, perhaps in hope of engaging enemy aircraft. Though British cavalry had been equipped with Maxim heavy machine guns at an early stage, there were demands for a lighter support weapon. Experimentation revealed the Lewis gun to be unsuitable for horsed movement, but the establishment of a factory to produce Hotchkiss light machine guns at Coventry in 1915 provided the opportunity for re-equipment with the Hotchkiss in .303in calibre, initially on a scale of one per troop.

A partial solution to the British manpower shortage was only hammered out surprisingly late in the day. Haig threatened that some units might have to

be disbanded without a significant influx of replacements, and also hinted at his own resignation. Nevertheless, while Haig stayed in place and Robertson was moved on, the thinning-out of British divisions went ahead and was carried out during January–March 1918. The blow fell hardest on second-line Territorial and ‘New Army’ units, which underwent a programme of amalgamations, with sister battalions absorbed into one unit. While Guards and Regulars enjoyed a degree of protection, divisions were cut back to nine battalions – the same as the German Army – and about 140 battalions disappeared from the British order of battle. One of many to be disbanded was 19th Manchester, alongside 2/4th and 8th East Lancashire; and 2/5th East Lancashire survived only as a ‘training cadre’ from April 1918, being disbanded that July. While such reforms were disruptive on the eve of enemy attack, it did at least mean surviving battalions were brought up to respectable strength, each division having a battalion of Vickers machine guns in addition to the Lewis guns that had been attached to the infantry since 1915, so arguably firepower remained as good as before.

TACTICS AND TRAINING

German

As of 1913, German infantry training began with individual disciplines and skills, such as marching and shooting. Then larger elements were gradually brought together over time so the annual *Kaisermanöver* could be conducted in peacetime, in the presence of the Kaiser, with entire armies. These arrangements were supported by the existence of both local training grounds and much bigger regional training areas, or *Truppenübungsplätze* (troop training grounds). These included Sennelager in Westphalia; Grafenwöhr in Bavaria, opened in 1910; Lockstedter Lager, opened near Hamburg in 1872; and Döberitz west of Berlin, which had existed in the time of the Prussian monarch Frederick the Great (r. 1740–86) but was expanded in 1895, and later housed an airfield and infantry training school.

The yearly training cycle shrank during the war so that after a couple of months, recruits passed from their home bases to recruit depots behind the front where men received the remainder of their preparation. As of 1917, instructions for company commanders outlined a demanding 12-week infantry training schedule, including battlefield movement under artillery fire, grenade throwing, route marches, orders, reconnaissance and patrol work, gas

defence, crossing obstacle zones, night action and *Stoß* ('shock') tactics. The training at the recruit depot was all the more realistic because it was delivered primarily by NCOs and officers who had served at the front, sometimes on terrain with trenches and shell holes.

With the increasing use of automatic weapons and other supporting arms, specialized training schools were also extensively used. Kummersdorf in Brandenburg had housed an artillery testing range since 1871, and from 1913 also served as a space for the dropping of aerial bombs. Jüterbog, near Germany's border with Denmark, had the trench-mortar school. Machine-gun schools were established in several places including Hammelburg in Bavaria, Döberitz in Brandenburg and Beverloo in occupied Belgium.

It is commonly asserted, particularly by British and American writers, that new 'storm troop' tactics were developed on the Eastern Front during the second half of 1917 by General der Infanterie Oskar E. von Hutier. Rather they were the result of the efforts of many officers over a long period, their genesis beginning quite quickly after the first formation of solid trench lines in the West in late 1914. Before 1914 was over, various close-combat and mêlée weapons were used to supplement the rifles of the German infantry during raids, clearing or breakthrough attempts on enemy trench lines. These supplementary arms included clubs, daggers, sharpened entrenching tools and shields. Yet by far the most promising was the grenade, a weapon used in siege warfare for centuries and still on the inventory of the *Pionier* units. By 1915, *Handgranatentruppen* (hand-grenade squads) were formed to bomb their way down or along trenches. Seeking to improve on what were often local improvisations, Oberst Max H. Bauer of the General Staff called into being three small *Versuchtstruppen* (experimental units) in early 1915 to test the effectiveness of trench-warfare weapons.



Born near Posen in Prussia (modern-day Poznań, Poland), Erich F.W. Ludendorff (1865–1937) was first commissioned in 1885 and rose rapidly, working alongside Oberst Max Bauer and under Generalfeldmarschall Alfred von Schlieffen in the German General Staff. As the 2. Armee's deputy chief of staff he fought in Belgium in 1914, then in the East as Hindenburg's chief of staff. When Hindenburg became Chief of the General Staff, Ludendorff followed him in the capacity of First Quartermaster-General and deputy. Ludendorff played a key role in 1918, and his *War Memories* (Ludendorff 2005) are an important, if not always reliable, source for the history of the campaign.



General der Infanterie Oskar von Hutier (with cane), GOC 18. Armee, and his chief of staff Generalmajor Traugott Martin von Sauberzweig (with dark armband) are accompanied by staff officers during the Spring Offensive, 1918. Innovative 'storm troop' tactics supposedly led to the German taking of the port city of Riga in Latvia on 3 September 1917, and were brought by Hutier to the West when he was given command of the 18. Armee, resulting in the early successes of Operation *Michael* in March 1918. This myth was promulgated particularly by General Gough in his 1931 book *The Fifth Army*, in which it was used as an explanation for the failure to hold the German offensive in its early stages. In reality, while Hutier was a more than usually successful general who won the *Pour le Mérite mit Eichenlaub* as well as a dozen other decorations, he had little influence on tactical developments. Nor were the 'new' tactics developed in the East, by any one person, or even exclusively in 1917. (ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

The experimental unit led by Hauptmann Bernhard Reddemann, former Posen fire chief, already existed in outline, having been formed at the end of 1914, taking the name of its commander to become Flammenwerferabteilung Reddemann (flamethrower detachment Reddemann). Initially there were under him Offizierstellvertreter Ambrosius and just 48 men. Their Fiedler-type weapons had a 100-litre (22-gallon) reservoir of fuel, projecting through an 11mm (0.43in) nozzle, creating a jet of flame lasting up to 45 seconds, to a range of 30m (98ft). After formation the unit moved from Berlin to Aachen on 1 February 1915, where it was outfitted with six Mannesmann trucks for transport of flamethrower teams, equipment and fuel. The first battlefield attack with flamethrowers was carried out on 26 February 1915 at Malancourt near Verdun.

The experimental unit led by Major Lothes (a personal friend of Bauer) was to test trench mortars. Both Lothes and Reddemann appear to have done good work. Flamethrowers became a standard part of the attack, with instance of deployment increasing as the war progressed, and specific tactics for flame assaults approved by December 1915. Trench mortars not only developed, but eventually became standard issue to infantry battalions. While Bauer praised both Lothes, who died at Verdun, and Reddemann, it is the work of the third experimental unit that is the most important to our story.

Initially commanded by an engineer officer, Major Kalsow, this third formation was tasked with the testing of small assault cannon. His raw material consisted of 20 examples of the new 3.7cm Krupp light cannon, and a half-battalion of men drawn, not from elite regiments, but primarily from *Ersatz* troops. Working on ranges near Cologne during the spring of 1915, Kalsow formulated drills for the attack. First, *Pioniere* (combat engineers) were pushed forward using small shields to prepare the way for the cannons,

which were themselves advanced to engage enemy machine guns or resistance nests at close range. With resistance neutralized the remainder of the *Sturmabteilung* (storm detachment) could move up, fighting their way through with grenades. With preparations complete by the end of May, Kalsow's detachment moved to the Western Front in June 1915. Thereafter they were tested in battle during which one-third of the personnel and six of the cannons soon became casualties.

Bauer was less than satisfied, dismissing Kalsow as 'an engineer who considered his troops as such' (Bauer 1921: 87–89). On 8 September, Kalsow's command was handed over to Hauptmann Wilhelm M.E. Rohr, an outstanding and aggressive company commander of the Garde-Schützen-Bataillon, who had already been working with small-scale 'shock' tactics. Fortune smiled on Rohr when his unit was sent to General der Infanterie Hans Gaede, whose Armee-Abteilung B was fighting in the upper Alsace region. Sturmabteilung Rohr was rebalanced and re-equipped with the addition of six machine guns and four mortars, the surviving 3.7cm Krupp light cannons being later replaced with a battery of mountain howitzers. Rohr now had the wherewithal to tackle most missions out of his own resources, since he had supporting weapons included as organic to his unit. There was thus no need for the *Sturmabteilung* to rely on recourse to the artillery proper. Sturmabteilung Rohr was committed to battle at the *Schratzmannle* on 12 October 1915, but rather than rush in the whole body, just one company was used in concert with Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 187. Aided by flamethrowers, Rohr's men jumped into the enemy trench and bombed out the opposition, before being seconded by the infantry who brought with them materials to create 'trench blocks' to secure the position.



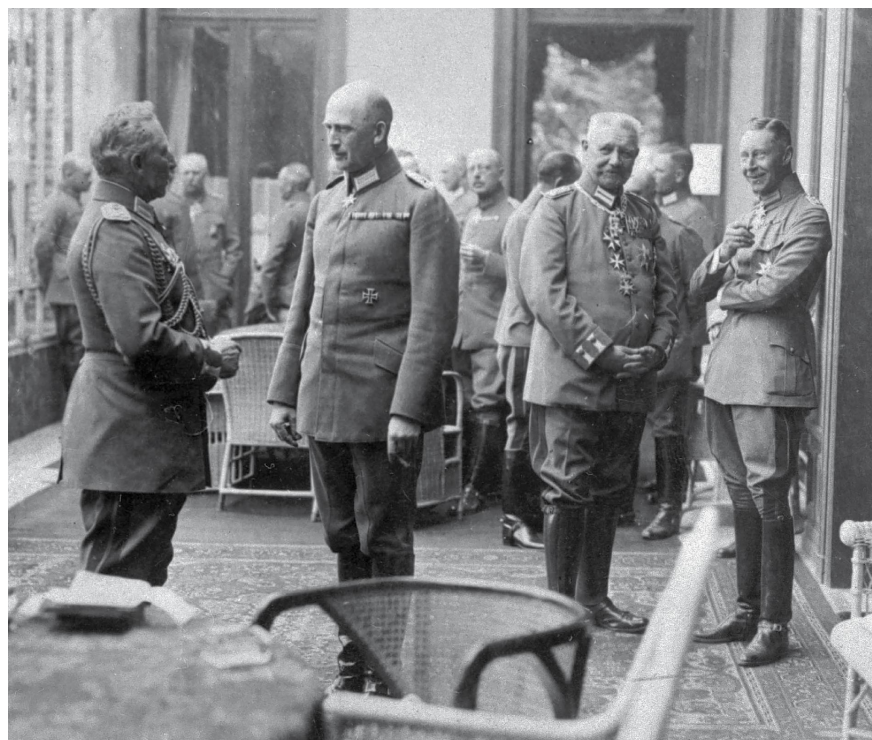
A German assault trooper festooned with stick grenades, probably intended for use by a colleague. Note the gas-mask cylinder on his right hip. (Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo)

Sturmabteilung Rohr went on to test the new *Stahlhelm* (steel helmet), and fought as part of the 5. Armee at Verdun; but this was only part of the story as other infantry units had also begun to form ‘shock’ units by this time. Moreover, Bauer did not see *Sturmtrupp* (storm troop) formations as an ‘elite’ spearhead but as a *Lehrtrupp* (teaching unit) or model, for the German Army

as a whole. Accordingly, Sturmabteilung Rohr began running courses for other formations. One of the first was a six-day programme for 400 men of the 12. Landwehr-Division. As of May 1916, the German High Command ordered the formation of a *Sturmabteilung* for every army on the Western Front. These could be used to lead attacks or counter-attacks, but their primary function was to train cohorts from each division, who could then pass on their knowledge until the entire German Army was schooled in 'shock' action.

Some of the basics of German infantry 'shock' tactics were covered in the manual *Nahkampfmittel* (Close combat materials), the first edition of which appeared as early as August 1916, and 'shock' units certainly fought during the battle of the Somme. What was not fully formulated until the winter of 1917, however, was coordination of the various arms, including artillery and aircraft, for a major offensive. The doctrine for this was advanced in the document *Der Angriff im Stellungskrieg* (The Attack in Position Warfare), published in January 1918. This important instruction was compiled by the surprisingly junior Hauptmann Hermann Geyer, though Geyer worked under Oberst Bauer in the Operations section of the General Staff, and Ludendorff himself had already canvassed generals as to what should be included in the manual.

While 'infiltration' methods have been widely discussed since 1918, it is instructive what *Der Angriff im Stellungskrieg* does, and does not say. Riga is mentioned only fleetingly, as are Verdun, Romania and Italy. It is the example of German actions at Cambrai in November 1917 that contributes most to the 'new' methods, *Der Angriff im Stellungskrieg* being a wide-ranging synthesis drawing on a broad range of lessons and experiences all the way back to 1915. Almost all of the 'new' tactics were trialled at Cambrai, where the Germans advanced 'in small columns' with many light machine guns and some flamethrowers, preceded by bombardment and covered from overhead by aircraft machine-gunning and bombing as they went (Gudmundsson 1989: 142).



Pictured at the German headquarters at Spa on 15 June 1918, the 30th anniversary of the start of his reign, Kaiser Wilhelm II (left) addresses Oberst Max Bauer as Generalfeldmarshall von Hindenburg (second right) and Kronprinz Wilhelm (right) look on. (ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Light machine guns acting as supporting fire for platoons, or even individual infantry *Gruppen* (sections) were crucial to the long-term success of 'shock' tactics. For while the standard MG 08 machine gun was highly effective in defence, used from the first day of the war, and sometimes carried in lorries with the *Jäger* infantry, its mobility in attack situations was very limited.

The British adopted the US-designed Lewis gun at an early stage, in 1914 purchasing a licence to manufacture this light machine gun (sometimes referred to as an 'automatic rifle') in Britain. The Germans were slower to find a solution, however, but various options were tried experimentally in 1915 including the Danish Madsen, a lightened version of the Bergmann machine gun and the water-cooled Dreyse; captured Lewis guns were also highly prized. Yet the option ultimately adopted was nothing more than a slimmed-down version of the old water-cooled MG 08, with a conventional rifle-type trigger, bipod and wooden shoulder stock added. This was not a particularly 'light' light machine gun, retaining a water jacket and weighing about 18.1kg (40lb). While very few were produced before 1915 was over,

the title 'MG 08/15' stuck, and the new weapon became the most common machine gun in German service, with four, and later six, per rifle company. Feeding from 250-round cloth ammunition belts, it could be carried into action by a single strong man if circumstances required, and could provide both direct supporting fire for the attack as well as defence from fixed positions.

British

Though it may be fair to claim that German tactics had advanced furthest by 1918, British tactics had also developed well beyond those employed in 1914. The reliable Mills grenade and the Lewis gun were both in use by 1915, but one of the biggest advances came in the wake of the battle of the Somme, when, in February 1917, GHQ updated the structure of infantry platoons to ensure they consisted of a 'combination of weapons'. Platoons became the bedrock of attack under the new *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action* (General Staff, UK 1917). The booklet was the work of Brigadier-General (later Major-General) Arthur Solly-Flood, who based his observations on French practice in the winter of 1916. These instructions set a minimum platoon strength of 28 and a maximum of 44 other ranks, exclusive of a command element, and decreed that any platoon falling below minimum should be made viable by amalgamation with others.

At 'average' strength the platoon was now defined as four sections, each of nine other ranks, plus a 'headquarters' of four other ranks plus platoon commander. Typically, rather than being identical to each other, the four sections were now a rifle section, bomber section, rifle bomber section and Lewis gun section. NCOs and other ranks were to carry rifle with fixed bayonet in the assault, except for Lewis gun No. 1 and No. 2, and rifle bombers if they had a 'cup attachment' fixed to their rifles. Individual sections were to be exercised in their specialisms, then trained to work with the other sections. Two men in each section were trained for scouting and sniping, and section commanders (commonly corporals or lance corporals) needed map-reading, fire-control, observation and message-writing skills. While mixed platoons were new to British regulations, similar things had been tried before, as a very similar arrangement was adopted by the French about a year previously.

In terms of 'general rules' for infantry tactics, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action* made it clear that platoons were the 'unit of

attack', encouraging platoon commanders to use surprise whenever possible, reconnoitre before movement, deploy lookouts, report back to company commanders and hold gains. The troops were to be exercised in live firing, night operations and other matters in conditions as close to those of real battle as possible. Platoon commanders were to gain the confidence of their men by presenting a good example, being skilled with weapons, well 'turned out' and punctual; just, but not 'soft' in terms of discipline; and quick to act, issue orders and see them carried out. While demanding, even 'blood thirsty', in terms of aggression, platoon commanders were also to recognize 'good effort' and to look after the comfort of the men.

Several formations were recognized for battle. In 'trench to trench' combat, attack platoons were arranged in two lines, each line consisting of two sections side by side with gaps between individuals. A second platoon deployed in similar manner formed a second wave, 50–100yd behind the first. A fifth advancing line could be added, these men being tasked with 'mopping up' on the objective. Two of these formations side by side created a two-wave company attack. 'Artillery formation' allowed platoon movement while limiting vulnerability to enemy shelling, with the platoon advancing on a frontage of about 100yd, its four sections spread in a diamond shape. The sections moved in small columns, but these could be single file, two or four abreast. For a company attack in 'open warfare', a 'firing line' was created using two lines, with riflemen and bombers to the fore, rifle bombers and Lewis gunners close behind. The 'supports' came up in two further lines about 100yd to the rear.



British troops prepare for a night raid. A crucial advance in British tactics from 1916 was the normalization of the night attack, not just in the form of raids, but as part of offensives. The first British use of wholesale night advance appears to have been on 14 July 1916 on the Somme, when General Henry S. Rawlinson, GOC Fourth Army, pushed forward parts of XIII and XV Corps, to a strength of about 22,000 men, before a successful dawn onslaught at Bazentin Ridge, the infantry moving in 'open columns' of platoons, guided by white tapes laid in advance. The logic of night attack was relatively simple. For even if an enemy detected movement by sound, using defensive weapons at night was fraught with difficulty. Targets that could not be picked out individually were not likely to be hit unless large volumes of fire could be deployed, and the chances of 'friendly fire' incidents between enemy units were significant. Massed fire also gave away defensive positions. The key risk for night attackers was loss of direction, as well as poor command and control of small units. Laying out tapes helped considerably, but required the work of brave men to precede the attack. By 1918 night movement using whole battalions, even divisions, was quite commonplace. Often an officer was put at either end of a night attack front to help prevent platoons spreading too wide or bunching towards the centre. In 42nd Division, 10th Manchester acquired the nickname 'The Night-Jars' due to its personnel's frequent inclusion in night operations. (The Print Collector/Print Collector/Getty Images)

Major-General Solly-Flood, GOC 42nd (East Lancashire) Division during 1918, also compiled a booklet of instruction and tactics aimed specifically at his troops (Solly-Flood 1918). This stressed the role of officers, reminding them that battles were won not only by skilful dispositions, but 'by fighting; the heroism, skill and firmness of the most junior officers' having 'the most far reaching results'. Moreover, officers were responsible for the safety of

their men, so far as that was compatible with success in battle, as well as their health, comfort, good behaviour and discipline. To be successful, the officer required both knowledge and 'character'. Knowledge came through study and hard work, which also helped form character, as by knowing his job the officer gained self-confidence. Tactical schools were established to help officers achieve perfection. Officers were to come down hard on slackness, but also remember they were comrades in the struggle. The men could tell if their officer knew his job, and only if he did would they in turn have confidence in him. Men could also tell if they were commanded by weak, slow, 'irresolute old women' in trousers.

In Solly-Flood's view, officers should continually ask themselves if they were taking every possible offensive and defensive opportunity, contributing to dominating no man's land and keeping enemy positions under fire. In order to do this they needed to keep themselves informed of the location and quantities of small-arms ammunition and grenades. The famous, and often thought apocryphal question, 'Am I as offensive as I might be?' actually appears in these notes.

As far as 'general tactics' were concerned, the 42nd Division notes specified rifle and bayonet as the main weapons of the 'infantry soldier' and that 'fire to cover movement' was crucial. Movement itself was to be made 'by surprise', though it was to be as well reconnoitred in advance as possible. Nobody should be halted on the battlefield unless protected. Solly-Flood also covered the basics of 'trench standing orders', including reliefs, sentries, equipment and snipers. His direction on 'personal equipment' in 42nd Division was that, even in the trenches, men would keep their equipment on, though it was possible to remove the small pack (haversack). Rifles were to be kept habitually with five rounds in the magazine, thus being ready, but with springs 'eased' and thus less likely to malfunction. Helmets were worn with chin strap under the chin, and respirators carried, but cotton ammunition bandoliers were not encouraged. Patrolling being vital, the 42nd Division notes included an example of a printed form on which composition, task, sketch map and report of a patrol could be recorded.

Again according to the 42nd Division history, a revised method of attack was employed in the latter part of the war when German resistance slackened. This was in three parts. First, strong patrols, adequately supported, and usually composed of one platoon, would advance 'by bounds'; these would continue forward until 'definitely held up, and the enemy located', then

artillery bombarded the 'points of resistance' and the patrols resumed forward movement, this time under a creeping barrage (Gibbon 1920: 182). If patrols were halted again, a 'set piece' attack would be organized.

As of 1917, British infantry training followed a 14-week syllabus. Men were placed in general 'regimental reserves' until 1916, but after the advent of conscription the flow of new men became a flood, and training reserve battalions were formed to accommodate the throughput. Where previously different training streams had existed for the 'New Armies', Territorials and Regulars, these were brought together with the intention of increasing uniformity and streamlining processes.

Exactly how old, and how fit, a recruit might be could influence where he went for training, so the very youngest of all fitness categories were intended for 'Young Soldiers' battalions, where they spent four months. At 18 years and eight months, young soldiers became eligible for Junior Training Reserve, Regimental Reserve, Territorial Reserve and Senior Training Reserve battalions. This range of possibilities conveys an impression that the authorities were more wary of underage recruitment in the latter part of the war, as well as more systematic about training.

Training reserve battalions were also used for retraining, so of a large six-company Training Reserve 'battalion', as many as half the complement might now be men returned from the BEF, convalescent or otherwise. The first part of the 14-week course in Britain brought men up to scratch in marching and shooting, with more advanced skills coming later, but not everybody completed the entire basic course, partly because there were not always enough SMLE rifles to go around, and partly because troops were taken prematurely when urgently required at the front. This was particularly the case with officers and NCOs of previous experience, and the instructors themselves were not immune to being swept up for the front, as they were time-limited to six months with the Training Reserve. Partially trained men had their card marked accordingly so training could be completed at an overseas base camp, such as the infamous Étaples in northern France. In addition there were specialist 'schools', particularly later in the war, where subjects such as sniping, machine gunnery and the use of mortars were taught. A period of five months (20 weeks) from recruitment to the end of training was typical for British conscripts, so men called to the colours after the summer of 1918 might not see combat. In later 1917 and 1918 there was no distinction in training regimen between men who had volunteered, men

who had come through the Derby Scheme, or conscripts. When the barrack gate closed behind a recruit distinctions effectively ended.



A cavalry Hotchkiss team in training at Aldershot, Hampshire. Machine guns were viewed as ideal dismounted cavalry support, though they were intended to move only partway towards the enemy in attack, to a position from which they could hit the enemy without themselves being put out of action. Two machine guns formed a 'section', being deployed sufficiently close to one another that each weapon could cover the other in event of a malfunction.

Conversely, bunching of men around machine guns was to be avoided lest they make an obvious target, and ideally only those actually required for operation of a machine gun should be near the weapon. In the case of Hotchkiss light machine gun, operation by two men was perfectly feasible if adequate quantities of ammunition were to hand. (PA/Alamy Stock Photo)

As we shall see, British dismounted cavalry followed similar tactics to the infantry in 1918, though dismounted work had in fact occurred much earlier in the war. In 1916, Indian cavalry on the Western Front received training in infantry combat and the use of the Hotchkiss in preparation for combat on the Somme. The 20th Hussars also undertook some dismounted work, and on at least one occasion had to dig their own trenches using improvised equipment, something the men heartily disliked.

The basic document informing cavalry tactics was still the *Cavalry Training* manual of 1912, but this was updated with amendments in 1915 (War Office, UK 1915). 'Dismounted action' occupied about 10 per cent of this volume. While encouraging commanders to think in terms of using

horses mobility to get riflemen from one point to another for surprise attack, 'use of ground', 'cover', 'rushes' and keeping the eye on a target between shots were all important, with 'troops' and 'sections' considered to be basic units of combat. When attacking on foot, cavalry were encouraged to form a 'firing line' and advance in depth, with scouts and supports as appropriate, before using 'mutual support by fire' and rapid short rushes to overcome the defence, then going prone at the end of each rush. 'Creeping and crawling' could also be used, though this was much slower than rushes, and regarded as 'exceptional'.



British troops in rudimentary positions, spring 1918. In theory, the 'forward zone' performed its function by delaying the enemy, inflicting casualties and alerting units further back. There was no expectation that the 'forward zone' would hold independently, and in the event of confrontation by overwhelming force, units could retire on the 'battle zone', 1–2 miles to the rear. Here were the toughest defences ideally positioned for permanent resistance, laid out to a depth of 1 mile or more. To attack a 'battle zone', enemy forces would be forced to advance over the forward area swept by machine guns, mortars and artillery, preferably pre-registered for the task. As its name suggested the 'battle zone' was expected to be where the main action took place, and where units stood and fought, taking advantage of prepared positions and fighting the enemy to a standstill. Yet even in this, General Gough's overstretched Fifth Army was given special dispensation so that when his 'battle zones' were faced with being overwhelmed, formations here could also retire to a line Haig had designated to the rear. The reasoning for treating Fifth Army differently becomes apparent when one considers that on average British divisions elsewhere were expected to cover a frontage of 3,555yd in March 1918, when Fifth Army divisions were given an average of 6,555yd. Unfortunately, the trench systems, bunkers and 'obstacle zones' were incomplete in March 1918, and this was particularly true of the Fifth Army sector. (Universal History Archive/UIG via Getty Images)

While cavalry and Yeomanry (the mounted equivalent of Territorial Force infantry) continued to be used on the Western Front, after the early phase of mobile warfare, 'dismounting' became increasingly common. Sometimes Yeomanry were used as observers or snipers in trench warfare, but a whole division, 74th (Yeomanry) Division, was created from dismounted Yeomanry in Palestine in 1917 and shipped to the Western Front the following year.

British defensive tactics had also changed significantly by the beginning of 1918, becoming very similar to those adopted by the enemy a year or so earlier, and based directly on German tactics. Rather than defend a single trench, or even several lines of trenches, defences were now considered in terms of 'zones', usually three in number, one behind another. The British 'forward zone' approximated to the German 'outpost zone' and was only intended to be strong enough to force the enemy into bombarding the position and making a set-piece attack. Ideally, enemy formations would be caught in a 'web' of posts and subjected to enfilade fire as they attempted to penetrate the position.

While Generalmajor Friedrich K. 'Fritz' von Loßberg is commonly associated with the German zone system, it was developed over time, and the French also arranged a system of three defensive positions at an early stage. At least initially, Loßberg had argued against elasticity and in favour of thinly manned outpost zones on reverse slopes to the fore of existing front lines. General der Artillerie Maximilian R. von Höhn's draft of a manual describing defence in depth was rewritten by Oberst Bauer and Hauptmann Geyer. Interestingly, the Canadian *Official History* (Nicholson 1962: 365–66) suggests that British defensive plans strayed from German models in that they allotted about two-thirds of the available manpower to static roles, while the Germans intended that two-thirds of their troops should be employed flexibly and not tied to redoubts and other strongpoints.

MORALE, MOTIVATION AND LOGISTICS

German

The state of German morale in 1918 is a significant topic of history, with ramifications far beyond infantry combat. German nationalists after November 1918 held that the Army was not defeated on the battlefield, and the eventual call for an armistice was instigated by betrayal on the home front. The evidence for this *Dolchstoßlegende* ('stab-in-the-back myth') was

that the Army still stood on occupied enemy territory at the end of the war, and that there were industrial strikes and politicians calling for a negotiated settlement. Revolutions did indeed break out in various parts of Germany, including Berlin and Munich. The Entente and Associated Powers (including the United States) took the opposite view, however: Germany had indeed been defeated, and it was the German High Command that asked for the Armistice. Ending the war in November 1918 was therefore the logical humanitarian option, befitting nations fighting the Great War for Civilization.



A young German soldier wearing the field uniform in use at the start of the war together with the steel helmet introduced in early 1916.

While the ‘stab in the back’ myth has been effectively debunked, at least since 1945, the state of German morale during the last year of war remains a live question. Though the idea that Germany went to war with universal enthusiasm is wrong, the Social Democrats, who had opposed enlargement of the fighting forces and the war itself, were mollified by the *Burgfrieden* (political truce of 1914) plus an expectation that they would be able to make

demands for democratization and social justice at the end of victorious hostilities.

The political truce of 1914 was gradually eroded by the differing war aims of the General Staff, politicians and population; a lack of anything except defensive success on the battlefield in the West from 1916; and the 'Turnip Winter' of 1916/17 with its shortages of materials and food. Heavy casualties, injustices in conscription and the treatment of soldiers and their families all weighed upon morale, both military and civilian. *Kriegsmüdigkeit* (war weariness) was countered by a campaign to promote the idea of *Durchhalten* (holding on doggedly; lasting out longer than the enemy).

Blockade, and difficulties of balancing the needs of the Army, agriculture and manufacturing, as well as crop failure in 1916, led to the 'Turnip Winter' and shortages of everything from animal fodder to munitions. This was only partially addressed by new laws and Hindenburg's drive concentrating on munitions, artillery and machine guns. Obtaining supplies and transport to the front fell under the purview of the Quartermaster General, from November 1916 Generalleutnant Viktor T.W. Hahndorff. Despite herculean efforts many German soldiers were hungry in 1918, so much so that breaking ranks to ransack enemy supplies was a menace to discipline.

Nevertheless, German troop morale was high at the beginning of 1918. Heavy losses were still replaced, primarily from the original recruitment areas of divisions. The collapse of Russia in late 1917 suggested that a Central Powers victory was possible, and that food supplies might improve. In something of a hostage to fortune, Ludendorff referred to the struggle as a 'Peace Offensive', implying that it would end the war. Many therefore assumed that Operation *Michael* would be the final effort.



A postcard by Berthed of Darmstadt showing the 'insignia of the infantry', 1918. Trench armour and a steel helmet are displayed along with barbed wire, grenades, a gas mask and a skull.

British

British troop morale certainly fluctuated over the course of the war, the high expectations of 1914 being tempered by fruitless attacks in 1915, then hammered by the four-month battle of the Somme in 1916 – the 'big push' that gained little ground and failed to deliver a predicted breaking of German resolve. Hopes recovered somewhat by early 1917 despite the carnage of the battle of Arras, before the Third Battle of Ypres later in the year again dealt a blow to the mood of the Army. In November 1917, the great 'Tank Raid' of Cambrai was optimistically received, though this good work was soon undone. Yet unlike the French in 1917, British troops never staged full-scale mutinies, contenting themselves with general grumbling and a few incidents in training areas where scores were settled with martinets. While

commanders tended to see conscription as entailing a watering-down of fighting spirit, this contention is difficult to discern as a significant phenomenon, and troops continued to respond to orders. There was a general awareness that 1918 was likely to be a difficult year in the West given the collapse of Russia. Even so, the fatalistic willingness of 'Tommy' to continue was given reason by increasing numbers of American troops in theatre, and grand plans for tank offensives, which senior officers appreciated might not come until 1919.

Having established a naval blockade against Germany, and not been brought to its knees by submarine warfare, Britain was ahead in the war of supply. British soldiers were generally well equipped by the standards of 1918, and while rationing operated in Britain, starvation was avoided. Troop rations were intended to provide a fairly generous 4,000 calories per day. Though British food was monotonous, it was still sought after by the enemy, who were delighted to ransack any captured depot. The Army Service Corps brought supplies to units, and British divisions contained ASC companies. Though horses remained crucial, motorized transport was increasingly common, more so than in the German Army.



A lightly kitted British soldier of 5th Battalion, The Duke of Wellington's Regiment (62nd Division), advances through the Bois du Petit Champ on 22 July 1918, passing the bodies of German defenders during the Second Battle of the Marne. According to *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action*, munitions carried by a British infantry platoon were to be sufficient for 'immediate requirements'. For 'trench to trench' action this was defined as a

minimum of 120 rounds of ammunition and 'at least' two grenades per man, except for bombers, Lewis gunners and other specialists. A Lewis gun section was to carry 30 ammunition drums, preferably with the ammunition carriers having two haversacks each, slung one each on chest and back, with two ammunition drums in the chest bag and one in the back. The 'bomb throwers' were to carry a minimum of five grenades apiece, with 'bomb carriers' to have ten or more per man. The rifle bombers' load would include a minimum of six rifle bombs, perhaps in a haversack with holes through which rods of bombs could project. A few flares and phosphorus bombs were also to be distributed in attacking platoons and 'mopper up' sections, with any additional munitions brought up by dedicated 'carrying parties'. Nothing was to be 'left to the imagination' either in terms of thoroughness or kit, with 'fighting order' and haversacks on the back being regarded as the default equipment. Pattern 1908 'large packs' were not to be carried in action. (Daily Mirror/Mirrorpix/Mirrorpix via Getty Images)

Manchester Hill

21 March 1918

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

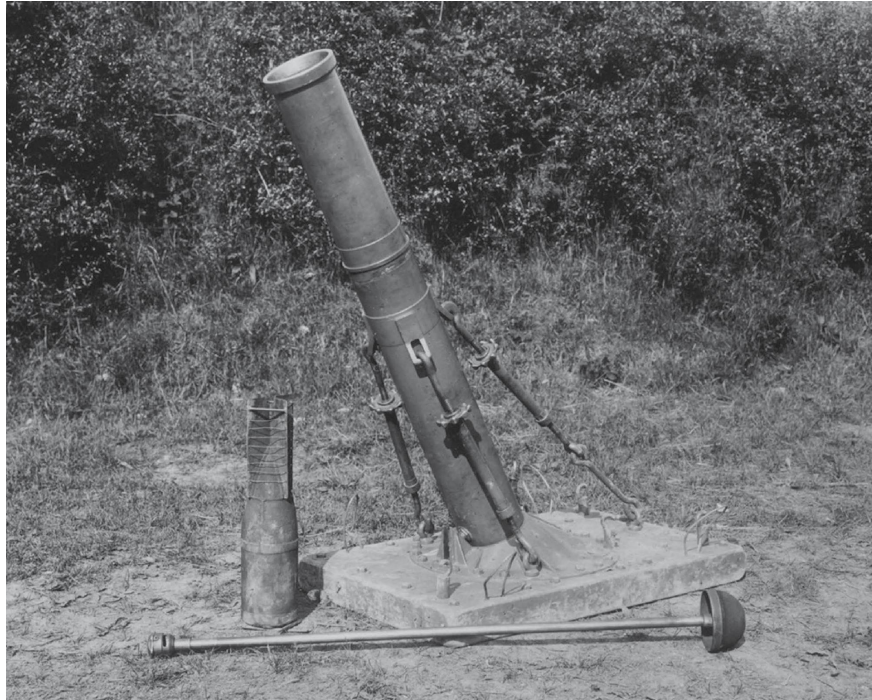
Manchester Hill, a defensive position in the British 'outpost zone', was so named due to its initial capture by 2nd Manchester in April 1917, though the Germans nicknamed the strongpoint 'Margarine Höhe'. Having suffered heavily in previous actions, 16th Manchester was in brigade reserve during the early part of 1918, and topped up by a draft of two officers and 280 other ranks from 19th Manchester in February. Major Robert Gibbon, acting commanding officer of 16th Manchester, spoke to the battalion stressing they were all essentially the 'same' people – having been raised about the same time in the same city, and having previously fought together in the same battles, albeit in different brigades. With Lieutenant-Colonel Elstob back in command of what the City Battalions' history describes as the 'composite' battalion, it was formally inspected by Field Marshal Haig on 13 February (Regimental Committee 1923: 45).

On 18 March, 16th Manchester moved up to the front line, taking over Manchester Hill redoubt and its immediate surroundings. The battalion was 740 in number, including 23 officers: fewer than notional battalion strength, but comparable with the average battalion at the time. The general scheme involved defence in depth with field works spread over an area, on a frontage of over 1 mile and to a depth of nearly 2 miles. The central position was Brown Quarry on the reverse slope of the rise, giving cover for dugouts from which troops, stores and messages could be relayed to the foremost line. The battalion was not deployed in continuous line despite the existence of contiguous trenches, but focused on numbered 'posts' within the position. The 'right front' area was occupied by A Coy under Captain Edward N. Ashe

MC, while 'left front' was taken by B Coy under Captain John Guest. Behind this forward line, C Coy was deployed in support, with two platoons led by Captain P.H. Heywood on the right and the remainder on the left under Captain O.T. Pritchard. Initially, D Coy and the battalion HQ occupied Brown Quarry and the immediate vicinity. The 'web' was intended to isolate any German parties that managed to infiltrate the front.



An officer of 16th Manchester, wearing 'trench coat' and steel helmet, attempts to catch up on paperwork, 1918. During the war The Manchester Regiment grew to 44 battalions, making it the third-largest infantry regiment in the British Army, behind only The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) and The King's (Liverpool Regiment).



Introduced into British service in early 1917, the Newton 6in trench mortar was a simple weapon that packed a big punch, but few bombs were available to the defenders of Manchester Hill. (US Army)

Close support was provided by four Vickers machine guns of 90th Infantry Brigade's machine-gun company, positioned to cover the lower ground of the dips either side of Manchester Hill. Two Newton trench mortars were in emplacements on the edge of Brown Quarry, providing plunging fire over the heads of the defenders. The brainchild of Captain Henry Newton of 1/5th Battalion, The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment), the two Newtons were hefty 6in pieces, capable of lobbing 52lb bombs with large box-shaped fins, about 1 mile. Longer-range support was summoned by field telephone, and consisted of two batteries of 18-pdr field guns of the Royal Field Artillery at Holnon Wood and Savy, 1 mile to the rear. On the evening of 19 March, 30th Division, increasingly concerned an enemy attack might be in the offing, held a divisional conference to prepare the defence, and at 2200hrs Saint-Quentin was doused with gas launched from projectors. Saint-Quentin was cramped by reason of the numbers of troops gathered there, which included the 187. Infanterie-Division, and doubtless became a good deal less pleasant as a result of the gas rained down. The next afternoon, mist hung over the fields and in the hollows about the

Saint-Quentin Canal, and British artillery observers found their view impeded.

During the hours leading up to the action, Elstob made several decisions that affected the coming battle, some prudent and timely, others questionable given circumstances. One of his best decisions was to send out scouts in front of Manchester Hill. This patrolling was carried out on the night of 20/21 March, but no signs of the enemy were detected. Another good idea was the use of 'SOS' red smoke, to be discharged in event of attack. On seeing this, artillery observers in the rear would alert gun batteries to open fire on predetermined targets, forming a box around the redoubt.

Perhaps Elstob's poorest command decision was to tell his men they were about to die. While the City Battalions' history may have exaggerated this for dramatic effect, it states that Elstob made the unsettling utterance at least twice (Regimental Committee 1923: 48 & 51). This poor leadership psychology may have contributed to a drop in morale. It was certainly in sharp contrast with Gibbon's more measured speech promoting a 'team effort' from all ranks (Regimental Committee 1923: 44). Also somewhat strange was an order given by Elstob at 0730hrs on the morning of the attack, when he directed battalion headquarters to move forward from Brown Quarry to an advanced 'Battle Headquarters' about 300yd further east towards the enemy. His objective was probably to put himself closer to the fighting line and a trench junction, from which he could visit forward posts relatively easily. Shells had already been falling for about an hour at this point, however, making movement more difficult, and the change of position exposed the entire headquarters staff, including signallers, to increased danger.



A German soldier encumbered by field-telephone equipment, 1918. Even cutting-edge technology often proved unequal to the task of maintaining battlefield communications during the advance. (Everett Collection/Alamy Stock Photo)

The 50. Infanterie-Division had been in Saint-Quentin for about a week by the time 'X' day (21 March) dawned. Now commanded by Oberstleutnant Böttcher, IR 158 was of good morale, rested, retrained, and topped back up to 2,035 men and 77 officers by the morning of the attack; a figure short of official 'ration strength' of 2,748, but still suggestive of about 700 all ranks

per battalion. The regiment had no mechanized transport though there were 300 horses and mules, and at least 80 machine guns present. IR 158 was also reinforced with a *Sturmkompanie*, a machine-gun *Sturmkompanie*, an infantry-gun battery, a mountain artillery battery and a flamethrower detachment. Each of the battalions of IR 158 had an integral machine-gun company and a *Minenwerfer* detachment. While Hauptmann Block led I./IR 158, Hauptmann Gabcke commanded II./IR 158 and Hauptmann Evers led III./IR 158.

The morning of the attack was foggy, but though this could have caused navigation difficulties, on balance it was of significant advantage to the attackers. So while the three battalions of IR 158 sorted themselves out and took some time to march to their jumping-off positions north of the Saint-Quentin Canal in spread-out 'artillery formation', none of this activity was seen by British observers in the concrete bunker atop Manchester Hill, one source even suggesting the post was abandoned when visibility was obscured (Middlebrook 1978: 265). As the IR 158 regimental history relates, the German battalions went forward to attack 'punctually' at 0940hrs (0840hrs in British time) close behind a creeping barrage, and 'through thick clouds of smoke' and fog 'so impenetrable' that in places visibility was limited to just 15m (49ft), continual artillery fire serving only to thicken the smoke (Möller 1939). While battalion-sized formations had none of the large and delicate radios used by the higher levels of organization, bugles and horns were better than nothing in fog, giving a primitive level of communication between companies.

Manchester Hill, 21 March 1918

MAP KEY

- 1 0730hrs:** The three battalions of IR 158 move out of Saint-Quentin and form up ready for their attack, unseen by 16th Manchester due to thick fog and shell bursts.
- 2 c.0850hrs:** I./IR 158 overcomes B Coy, 16th Manchester.
- 3 c.0900hrs:** Captain Ashe, OC A Coy, 16th Manchester, is killed during fierce fighting as III./IR 158 defeats his company.
- 4 c.1530hrs:** Lieutenant-Colonel Elstob and Captain Sharples are killed. Hauptmann Gabcke, CO II./IR 158, takes the surrender

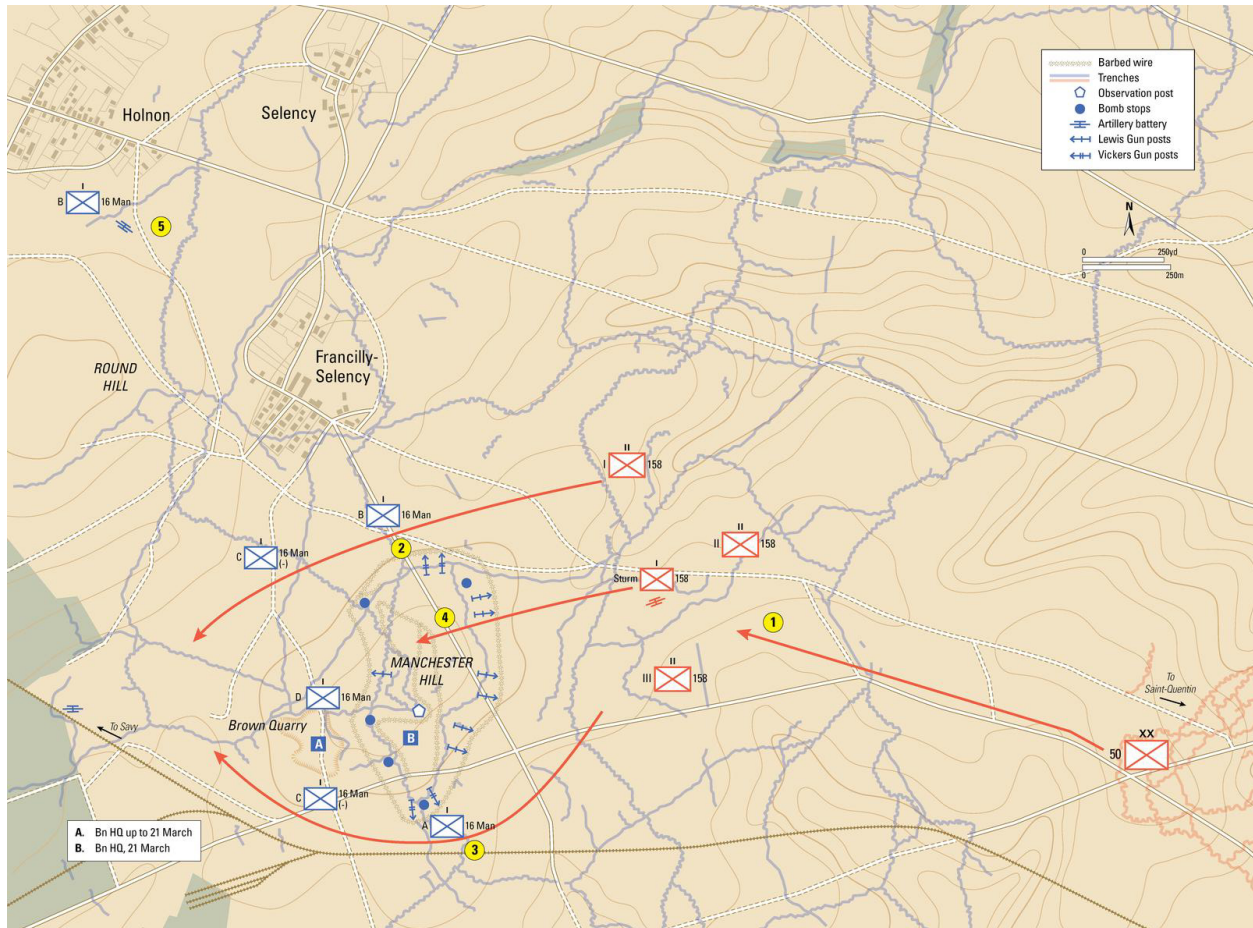
of the survivors of 16th Manchester.

5 c.1800hrs: As the Germans advance towards the battle zone, a platoon of 7./IR 158 encounters and captures a small body of British troops near Holnon.

Battlefield environment

While the Saint-Quentin area had been fought over earlier in the war, notably in 1914, the town had not been destroyed nor was the surrounding countryside the featureless quagmire of much of Ypres or Verdun. Photographs taken prior to 21 March 1918 show many houses in Saint-Quentin still standing, some complete with roofs, and still habitable by the German troops. Entente artillery fire had hit the town, but no concerted effort was made to obliterate it because it was French, of some historical interest, and might yet harbour some civilians.

Trenches existed from various dates before the Spring Offensive, some around the town and some outside, the latest having been dug by the British as part of efforts to create an 'outpost zone'. Manchester Hill was barely a hill, being more of a rise on which the redoubt (a ring of trenches) had been dug. The only 'hardened' feature here was a concrete observation post, though there were dugouts in both Brown Quarry and the redoubt. Thick fog on the morning of 21 March was crucial to the battle.



According to Block's report, the attack was regarded as both an assault on Margarine Höhe and Holnon Wood, the latter action carried out in conjunction with IR 53. Thick fog combined with artillery bombardment effectively blinded the British defence at an early stage, however, much reducing weapon effectiveness, particularly at longer ranges. As the City Battalions' history put it, Manchester Hill was almost impregnable on 'a clear day' (Regimental Committee 1923: 47).

At 0530hrs, Elstob visited his forward posts, and a final patrol was mounted in front of Manchester Hill. At 0630hrs the German artillery bombardment commenced, raining shrapnel, high explosive and gas. This was a disastrous combination on a wide front, with near-zero visibility and flanks no longer covered by the weapons of the redoubt. Many of the 16th Manchester men were forced into their respirators just when observation and readiness were crucial. Elstob crept out of the redoubt and turned south to make contact with Ashe and A Coy; Elstob's adjutant, Captain Norman

Sharples, turned north to check on Guest's B Coy position. With nothing apparently afoot, both officers soon returned to the redoubt.

INTO COMBAT

While 0730hrs brought no warning of anything untoward other than continuing artillery bombardment, I. and III./IR 158 now moved forward and deployed so as to advance into the depressions either side of Manchester Hill. Being officially designated as 'reserve', Gabcke's II./IR 158 hung back directly opposite the redoubt to ascertain how the moves on Gabcke's flanks developed before close engagement. Meanwhile the British patrol, still outside the defensive perimeter, found itself trapped in no man's land as 'friendly fire' from British artillery fell between the patrol and the redoubt.

While our focus is on Gabcke, his II./IR 158 and associated *Sturm* units, the conduct of Block and Evers also warrants attention. Confronted by a gradual lifting of the fog and knowing what primary objective their mission entailed, they did not keep their troops loitering in open ground. Ignoring the less important details of the timetable, they pressed on to the flanks of the redoubt. Advanced elements of III./IR 158 made contact with A Coy, 16th Manchester, at about 0815hrs. If British accounts are to be credited, the Germans took advantage of stealth and the fog to fall upon one of the Manchester sentries and bayonet him. Soon afterwards, the German artillery bombardment intensified again before III./IR 158 set upon A Coy in earnest. Field-telephone lines to the forward British companies were severed by the shelling. Outnumbering the Manchester men, III./IR 158 was soon making progress into the depression south of Manchester Hill. With German weight of numbers, the creeping barrage and covering fire from rifles and light machine guns, it would only be a matter of time before Ashe's troops were overcome. The fact that their commander was a brave fighter and a Military Cross recipient would make little difference. Small arms could not be fired blindly from the redoubt into the fog for fear of hitting British troops, but the Newton trench mortars were used, quickly running short of ammunition.

Block's I./IR 158 reached Guest's B Coy, north of the redoubt, shortly after the commencement of A Coy's struggle. Without field-telephone contact it was a few minutes before definite news of the twin fights raging north and south of the redoubt reached Elstob's battalion headquarters, but at about 0830hrs a runner appeared with the message that A Coy headquarters was almost surrounded. Much the same news was received from B Coy a few

minutes later. Block himself later reported that 'London' trench had been destroyed by the artillery bombardment with no initial resistance, allowing I./IR 158 to push on to encounter modest resistance at 'Voltaire' trench, then bypassing the *Widerstandsnester* (resistance nests) in the third 'Lloyd-George' position. Once Manchester Hill had been partially surrounded by the enemy, Elstob could, and probably should, have withdrawn his battalion westward. This was entirely within Fifth Army's defensive plans, which allowed falling back on the battle zone at some point. Because Elstob did not retire, however, 16th Manchester was now faced with the terrifying prospect of close assault by an enemy, well prepared and armed, but initially invisible to most defenders. Captain Ashe, originally of 8th Manchester but attached to 16th Manchester as A Coy commander, probably fell soon after 0900hrs, and is recorded on the Pozières Memorial.



A German artillery crew haul their 7.62cm Infanteriegeschütz L/16.5 out of a hole. Light-weight pieces such as this (608kg/1,340lb) were an attempt to provide the infantry with more mobile fire support. (Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo)



Soldiers of a Highland regiment await the German onslaught, March 1918. Contrary to popular belief, not all Highland units retained the kilt in the front line; some adopted trousers, while others covered the kilt with tan-coloured protective 'aprons'. (Official/Mirrorpix/Mirrorpix via Getty Images)

With the decision to stay and fight where he stood, Elstob almost ceased to act as battalion commander, and effectively transformed himself into a ferociously brave, first-class NCO. Gabcke started II./IR 158 forward against the redoubt after 0900hrs, and British artillery was again called into action at 0930hrs. By now, the fights on the flanks were virtually lost for the British, with A Coy and B Coy worn away by overwhelming assaults. As the 90th Infantry Brigade war diary observed, all the careful preparations had been 'nullified by the fog', which allowed the Germans to advance unseen in overwhelming strength. When A Coy and B Coy defences collapsed a number of men were killed, but quite a few of the Manchesters threw up their hands when the fight became untenable and the Germans then took prisoners. Not all of A Coy and B Coy were killed or captured, however, as a handful managed to make their way back in the direction of Savy, or scrambled back up Manchester Hill. As if to bring the point home, machine-gun fire and rifle grenades launched by men of I. and III./IR 158 now harassed both sides of Manchester Hill.

The Germans' first effort to take Manchester Hill itself came via 'Havre' trench from the direction of the Saint-Quentin–Savy road, made by IR 158's *Sturmkompanie* equipped with grenades. Elstob responded by asking brigade, via the surviving field-telephone link to the rear, for the red 'SOS' box barrage to be fired around the redoubt. Then he moved up to the threatened position in person, helping to protect a 'bombing block' that had been hastily thrown down into the trench to halt the enemy. According to at least one

account, Elstob now entered the fray personally, 'emptying his revolver on an enemy bombing party a few yards down the trench' (Bonner n.d.: 4). Though it was claimed that Elstob hit several of this *Gruppe*, more Germans appeared until his revolver ammunition was exhausted and an exchange of grenades ensued. When Elstob and his men got the better of this duel, the Germans switched tactics, and instead 'came over the top' in numbers (Regimental Committee 1923: 49–51). Elstob then seized a rifle, leading others in defending the position until some of the enemy succeeded in reaching the lip of his trench and throwing a grenade inside. Elstob was lucky to suffer only minor injury.

It was also about this time, realizing that the redoubt was a tough nut to crack, that the Germans, and very probably Gabcke himself, ordered up the infantry-gun company. The guns were towed forward by horse teams, drivers on the lead horses. Realizing that horses were harder to replace than German soldiers, British riflemen took down horse teams within range, delaying the close deployment of the German battery. These were not the only German support weapons used, however, as enemy artillery also fired from longer range from time to time. Gibbon was severely wounded in the arm and shoulder by what the City Battalions' history called a 'pineapple bomb', a missile from the 'priest mortar', otherwise known as *Granatenwerfer* to the Germans (Regimental Committee 1923: 50).

At about this point Elstob beat a hasty retreat within the redoubt to have his wound dressed, presumably by the already overworked battalion medical officer, Captain Walker, or his medical corporal, William Stenson, who was also wounded at an early stage. Back on the field telephone to brigade headquarters, Elstob reported the outbreak of fighting in and around the redoubt, and was informed in return that with fog now dispersing, German troops could be seen passing the redoubt and heading towards Savy. The outraged Private Charles Heaton (of 2 Platoon, A Coy) would subsequently confirm he saw Germans moving openly a few hundred yards behind Brown Quarry at about this time, and wondered why no machine gun was positioned there. These marching Germans were men of III./IR 158 exploiting their breakthrough. Some would sweep around the back of Manchester Hill, while others would threaten the Royal Artillery gun line 1 mile to the rear. This was significant, as artillery crews could not stand up to close infantry in numbers, and relocation meant firing had to stop.

Hauptmann Block described how he was marching his men down the road towards the British battle zone when the sun came out, suddenly revealing a promising target (Möller 1939: 575). A British artillery battery was about 200m (219yd) from the road, barrels trained in the direction of Saint-Quentin. Taking some of his own men, plus a detachment from IR 53, he advanced on the gunners shouting ‘Hands up!’ in English, and attempted to secure the guns. The majority of the gunners – 60, according to Block – gave themselves up. Not pausing long, and taking advantage of the situation, Block was soon in sight of the battle zone. His first company was before Savy at about 1500hrs, aware that Gabcke’s II./IR 158 was now in Brown Quarry (Möller 1939: 570). According to IR 158’s regimental history, 7. and 8./IR 158 played crucial parts in the taking of Manchester Hill, with Leutnant Winkelhausen of III./IR 158’s machine-gun company gathering other subunits under command, and Sergeant Wilhelm and Unteroffizier Stippler deploying a *Stosstrupp* to seize two British machine guns.



A British Lewis gun team in gas masks, 1918. (INTERFOTO/History/Alamy Stock Photo)

Being burly and athletic, the 29-year-old Elstob was not out of action for long as a result of his grenade injury, and was soon seen carrying bombs and ammunition to his men in different parts of the defence, offering encouragement as he went. His next wound was caused by a shell burst that blew him several yards across Brown Quarry. Further field-telephone calls to

brigade headquarters gave the impression that many of 16th Manchester were now wounded, everyone was tired, and that hand-to-hand fighting had started inside the redoubt; nevertheless, the officer that spoke with Elstob was left with the impression that he remained 'cheery', and the fight would go on (Regimental Committee 1923: 51).

A number of the Manchesters were notable in the defence. Sergeant Archer Hoye now manned a post on the western edge of Brown Quarry with two others and used a Lewis gun to protect the position from the rear. He had been in action some time and hit an unknown number of the enemy before he needed to change the gun's ammunition pan. While he was thus engaged two Germans emerged nearby, and Hoye was shot with a pistol. The body of 32-year-old Archer Hoye of Radnor Street, Hulme, was not recovered, and he is recorded on the Pozières Memorial. RSM Potter and CSM Thomas Brown of D Coy (both decorated for previous actions) were also recorded to have done good service, keeping ammunition supply moving and leading 'bombing parties' to counter-attack German lodgements within Brown Quarry and the redoubt.

Captain Sharples, the battalion adjutant, was remarkable for encouraging the men, and for taking to the fire step himself, shooting a rifle at the enemy with 'quiet confidence' (Regimental Committee 1923: 50). Exactly how the 27-year-old Sharples met his end is not without questions, though RQMS Jenkins reported that Sharples was under cover near Elstob, when the latter was engaged in throwing grenades at the enemy. A sniper hit the battalion commander, who was at that moment refusing to surrender, and Sharples gamely jumped up to pull him into the trench. Jenkins could do nothing, being out of ammunition, and Sharples was also shot. Jenkins was soon captured, so he said, by a German officer with a pistol wearing a 'field cap'. Elstob's death was estimated at 1530hrs, and certainly there was no reply when brigade subsequently attempted to reach him by field telephone. The outnumbered defenders collapsed quickly after their commander fell.



Introduced a decade before World War I, the .303in Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE) rifle was arguably the most practical of its generation. While it may have been fractionally less accurate than the German 7.92mm Mauser Gew 98 rifle, the SMLE had a ten-round magazine, quicker action and a shorter overall length, making for easier handling in confined spaces. The SMLE depicted here is a BSA-manufactured Mk III, produced in 1915. It shows how the rifle is loaded by placing a five-round charger in the guides above the breech and pushing down. Two chargers fill the ten-round magazine.

Private Heaton was in a dugout when the Germans arrived, and a stick grenade bounced down the steps. An officer's pet terrier ran to pick it up and the bomb exploded. Candles blew out and the dog was killed, but 14 men responded to the call when a German officer shouted down for surrender.

In an odd appendix to the capitulation at Manchester Hill, Leutnant der Reserve Kämpfgen, leading a platoon of 7./IR 158, was approaching Holnon Wood later in the day when a body of British troops led by a mounted officer came into view along a sunken road. Kämpfgen deployed his men and the British obligingly walked into the trap and promptly surrendered. Kämpfgen relieved the British officer of his horse, and kept it for a while until obliged to relinquish the animal. German sources also relate a grenade battle during the night at the Holnon position in which Kämpfgen and his men played an important part, rolling up about 100m (109yd) of British trench line.

Lieutenant-Colonel Wilfrith Elstob was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions at Manchester Hill. While some retellings have it that Manchester Hill was a 'last man' stand, this is hardly supported by statistics. Robert Bonner (Bonner n.d.: 8) names three officers and 75 other ranks killed, though this does not agree with the City Battalions' history in

which 15 officers are named as killed on 21 March, with 68 other ranks dead, plus at least one man, Private Crispin Lamb, listed as having died of wounds two days later. Calculating the captured at 'certainly' over 500, Steadman (1994: 213) puts the number of dead at 74 other ranks plus five officers, very similar to Middlebrook's count of 73 (1978: 333). Checking samples from other lists against the latest Commonwealth War Graves Commission information suggests that none of these casualty figures is absolutely precise, as for example Captain Pritchard, named as dead in the battalion history, does not appear as killed on 21 March, though there was an officer of similar surname who died with 20th Manchester on another date. Acting Captains Guest and Heywood also lack confirmation, so may well have been captured along with ten other officers, rather than killed. Middlebrook concludes, probably correctly, that a majority of the officers named in the 16th Manchester battalion history as fatalities were actually still alive after 21 March.



Soldiers of Infanterie-Regiment König Wilhelm I (6. Württembergisches) Nr. 124 with the new Mauser T-Gewehr. Introduced in 1918, the T-Gewehr was the world's first anti-tank rifle. Effectively a giant 13mm single-shot bolt-action rifle, it could penetrate the armour of a Mk IV tank, but needed to hit a vital part of the engine, or crewmen, to have a hope of disabling the tank.

Many of the deceased among the battalion's other ranks hailed from Manchester and surrounding areas of Lancashire, and several of them, such as Privates Myles Carrigan (of Newton Heath) and Frederick Moran (of Salford), had Irish names. One extraordinary fatality was Private Hermann Schaefer of Ardwick, a German who did not return to Germany in 1914, but joined the British Army and died fighting his own countrymen. At least a few of the men had distinguished service behind them when they fell at Manchester Hill. Private Alfred H. Hopkinson of Shaw held the Military Medal, as did Private Tom Fitton of Whitefield. Lance Sergeant Frank Snowdin (of Retford, Nottinghamshire), had a Distinguished Conduct Medal.

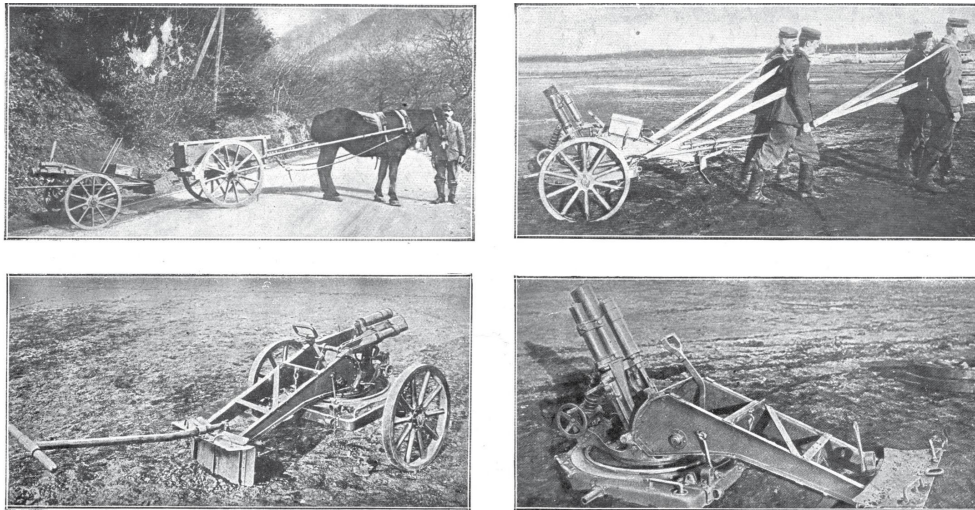


A dead German machine-gunner is pictured with his bipod-mounted 7.92mm MG 08/15 in a makeshift fighting position, 4 November 1918. While the weapon proved a major part of German defensive measures during the latter part of 1918, it also played a crucial role in the Spring Offensive fighting. (Interim Archives/Getty Images)

Interestingly, the 16th Manchester battalion headquarters and the interior defenders of the redoubt were effectively 'wiped out' though not actually killed, the battalion history claiming that of eight officers and 160 men in this central position, only two officers and 15 other ranks escaped, though in fact many of the remainder were among the captured. Some of the confusion about who was alive, dead or wounded was undoubtedly caused by the large number of British prisoners taken, an unknown number of whom were wounded, some mortally, and it would be a while before definitive

information was received. As Middlebrook observes (1978: 336), in this context 16th Manchester's stand was 'to the end' only in the sense that resistance continued until delay and casualties had been inflicted on the Germans. Many of the bodies of 16th Manchester personnel were never recovered, or not identified, and as a result Elstob and others are recorded on the Pozières Memorial as having no known grave.

The 'myth' of Manchester Hill was stoked very quickly. Haig concluded, in a characteristically snap judgement, that his commands were 'fighting magnificently' (Sheffield & Bourne 2005: 389). Lieutenant-General Maxse wrote to all of 30th Division's units on 3 April, congratulating them for their 'hard fighting' and 'gallant spirit'. Some, including the battalion quartermaster, could not believe that Elstob was actually dead. A memorial service was held at Manchester Cathedral on 15 April, at which time it was understood there were very few survivors and 16th Manchester had ceased to exist. Apart from mourning the loss of the battalion, whose men were endowed with what he called 'sublime characteristics', Dean of Manchester James E.C. Welldon also used his sermon to stir up further hatred of the enemy (Stedman 1994: 219).



Four views of a German *Minenwerfer*, showing how this ingenious weapon could be drawn by a single horse or a four-man team. (The Print Collector/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

Back on 21 March, Major Rupert E. Roberts, now *de facto* commander of 16th Manchester, gathered together remnants of the battalion – a total of two officers and 70 men – and set off on a march. Retreating, and knowing that many of their comrades had been captured or killed, 'sublime' was probably

the last word they might have brought to mind. An original officer of 16th Manchester, Roberts had recently served as commandant of the 90th Infantry Brigade school of instruction. A few days later, it appears that at least five officers and 111 men were not only still alive but acting under orders, having retired via the battle zone to Moreuil. The 37-year-old Major Roberts was mortally wounded on 26 March and buried at Rouen. Captain J.T. Ball, the quartermaster, was still in hospital, having taken shell fragments to the elbow and thigh, though he was by this time both coherent and ambulant.

Though we now have a fairly reliable total for the losses suffered by 16th Manchester at Manchester Hill, being approximately 80 killed and about 500 captured or wounded, the casualties of IR 158 are less clear. We can say that the German losses were significant, however, given that they were attacking an entrenched position on 21 March, and that the 50. Infanterie-Division in its entirety 'ran out of steam' and had to be withdrawn just over a week later (Möller 1939: 570–90). Surviving records of other German regiments attacking on 21 March show average total casualties of 365 men, of whom 71 were killed and 31 missing, the remainder of this total comprising the more or less seriously wounded. The 3. Magdeburgische Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 66, which attacked just to the north and west of IR 158 against what the Germans called 'Tommy Hill' and Holnon, is known to have lost 182 dead, 554 wounded and 95 missing over the five days 21–25 March: the IR 66 attack was also deemed to have been successful. In the case of IR 158, losses may therefore have been about average, given the totality of the German victory. We do know that two German platoon commanders were killed, and that Landwehr-Leutnant Alsweh, the officer who led 8./IR 158 in the final assault, lost an arm.

To assess Manchester Hill properly requires the context of what happened elsewhere on the same day. According to Commonwealth War Graves Commission records, about 8,500 British soldiers died on 21 March 1918 (against about 10,000 Germans), and the British Army lost another 21,000 men taken prisoner (against a few hundred Germans). Total losses of all description, including wounded, were approximately 39,000 on each side. This was a huge total, in the British instance being about two-thirds of that suffered on the first day of the battle of the Somme. About 80 per cent of these losses were infantrymen, with the artillery accounting for a further 9 per cent. General Sir Julian H.G. Byng's Third Army, to the north of General Gough's Fifth Army, had a greater density of defenders and better prepared

fieldworks, as well as more reserves. Third Army held well, but in doing so suffered proportionately higher casualties. Fifth Army, with a lower density of defenders and more space in which to manoeuvre, was handled more flexibly, crumpling under assault but taking fewer losses per division. Five of Gough's divisions still held the fronts of their battle zones at the end of the day, while the 36th, 14th and 18th, all generally accounted 'good' divisions, were pushed to the back of, or right out of their battle zones. For its part, 30th Division held its battle zone successfully, suggesting that the fight at Manchester Hill had at least fulfilled a definite purpose. Less promisingly, Gough had little in reserve, and, as we shall see, called upon everything available, including dismounted cavalry, to stop the German flood.

Ten Victoria Crosses were awarded for actions on 21 March 1918, most to infantry officers, but two went to other ranks, and one each to artillery and Machine Gun Corps officers. This was close to the record for VCs on a single day, 11 having been awarded for Rorke's Drift in 1879. Elstob's award fits a pattern. The other redoubt commander to die on 21 March was the comparatively junior officer Second Lieutenant Edmund De Wind of 15th (Service) Battalion (North Belfast), The Royal Irish Rifles, which held Race Course Redoubt near Grugies and surrendered after 1800hrs. De Wind was also awarded a posthumous VC. Two redoubt commanders who were wounded before capture were both awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Unwounded redoubt commanders who surrendered faced courts of enquiry when they returned home after the war. Perhaps the most inglorious defence of the day was that of 2nd Battalion, The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, at Boadicea Redoubt, the personnel of which filed out of their position having agreed a surrender with the enemy, with upwards of 520 men being captured. Middlebrook contends (1978: 338–39) that Fifth Army suffered a general collapse of morale, though his claim is also controversial given that the Germans were generally held in or around the battle zone on the first day, much as had been intended in the original British plan. General Gough paid for 21 March with dismissal a week later. He never recovered from what he felt was being made a scapegoat, and stated that he had deliberately defended forward positions as long as possible to avoid a 'battle in retreat' (Gough 1931: 262). Haig told his wife that some of Gough's decisions were 'stupid', but the field marshal's own papers state that Gough was removed on the order of the Cabinet in London (Sheffield & Bourne 2005: 421).



Royal Garrison Artillery gunners crew a 6in Mk VII heavy gun behind a chalk ridge in the V Corps sector near Hédauville, west of the Ancre River, on 26 March 1918. (Press Illustrating Service/FPG/Archive Photos/Getty Images)

Difficult as it is to criticize a regimental hero who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, there appear to be two major reasons why the battle at Manchester Hill went the way it did. The first was the weather, for without fog British observers, artillery gunners and machine-gunners would undoubtedly have made a better fist of their work, striking more of their targets at longer range, and keeping commanders better informed; General Gough speculated that German losses would have been double their number in clear weather (Gough 1931: 262). The second reason for the events at Manchester Hill lies in the decisions taken by Lieutenant-Colonel Elstob himself. Much depended on what actually happened at the divisional conference on 19 March: was Elstob properly briefed as to the purpose of the outpost line, and did he understand it if he was told? To leave an entrenched position and retire, particularly without a specific order from brigade or division, was contrary to everything taught earlier in the war, and Elstob bravely chose to stand and fight, whatever the consequences; but his intimation to his battalion that they were doomed made it more, rather than less, likely they would surrender if opportunity arose. Six decades after the event, Private Heaton related that Elstob had told them there was ‘no running back from Manchester Hill’ (Heaton interview). An order to redoubt commanders from Lieutenant-General Maxse giving explicit permission to

break out to the rear that evening came at 1555hrs, too late to have any relevance to Manchester Hill. It is also notable how well IR 158 fought, not only reacting well to orders but in the case of Block and Evers, working independently of regimental command to develop the tactical situation to their advantage, taking surrenders where possible.

Rifle Wood

1 April 1918

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

Spectacular as the opening of the *Kaiserschlacht* undoubtedly was, it had not achieved everything Ludendorff had hoped. Even so, while British High Command doubted the Germans' ability to continue their advance on 22 March, this is exactly what they did: German forces started moving westward as early as 0400hrs even though the fog was reinstated by atmospheric conditions overnight. Appeals to the French Army for support brought agreement that the 125e Division d'infanterie would march to assist General Gough's hard-pressed men. Gough himself approved fighting retreats if commanders felt pressed to retire, and Lieutenant-General Maxse ordered XVIII Corps back to the Somme. As Gough would later explain, Haig agreed that the work of the British forces in the south was to delay and exhaust the enemy 'without exposing my Army to annihilation' (Gough 1931: 238). Even so the German High Command, realizing that the British were hardest pressed on the southern part of the front, took understandable decisions to reinforce success here.



A German machine-gun team manhandle their MG 08 on sled mount, Picardy, 21 March 1918. Note the discarded German assault gear around the team. (Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo)



A smartly attired soldier of the 20th Hussars. Service dress is worn with cap, puttees and boots with spurs for mounted use. The leather bandolier is the Pattern 1903. Introduced after the Second Anglo-Boer War, this five-pocket design held ammunition more securely than the relatively flimsy types used in South Africa. While the Pattern 1903 saw some use with infantry, during World War I it was used almost universally by mounted troops, with spares being carried on the horse. (The Palmer Archive/Alamy Stock Photo)

As early as 5 March, Gough's Fifth Army staff had realized every last man would be needed in the event of a major enemy offensive. That very day, a dismounted company of 20th Hussars under Captain Walter D'Arcy Hall moved forward to Vermand to assist digging trenches and creating obstacle zones, and thereafter a 'Dismounted Brigade Group' was formed under Lieutenant-Colonel George T.-R. Cook DSO, CO 20th Hussars, as part of III Corps' defence scheme. On 18 March Cook's detachment arrived at Jussy, which was heavily bombarded on the morning of 21 March. As the German breakthrough began, the dismounted cavalry units were ordered back across

the Crozeat Canal to conform with 14th (Light) Division. Nevertheless the German forces continued to plough westward into an inviting gap, potentially threatening the rail junction at Amiens – and in agreement with current attack doctrine, the Germans were not unduly worried about their flanks. The British cavalry, lacking orders to intercept, now manoeuvred via Lagny and attempted to cover the crossing of the Dives River. On 25 March, a second dismounted detachment was formed under Brigadier-General Thomas T. Pitman, using about 100 men from each of the cavalry regiments present. Initially, the 20th Hussars contingent was commanded by Second Lieutenant John C. Bland, but at Pontoise he handed over to Captain Hall.

The French were compelled to evacuate Noyon on 26 March and late that afternoon Cook's detachment withdrew again, though not without loss, being hit by artillery fire. By extreme bad luck, Cook, a Second Anglo-Boer War veteran aged 40, was the only fatality. Soon afterward, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur C. Little took command of the regiment.

With the Germans now reported to be south of Montdidier and threatening the main rail line to Paris, 2nd Cavalry Division again manoeuvred to block the enemy. Having made contact with the French 56e Division d'infanterie, the British cavalry were then diverted to a threatened breakthrough near Moreuil, about 30km (18.6 miles) south-east of Amiens. On the morning of 30 March they reached the Bois L'Abbe, where they remained sheltered as the weather turned to rain. The Royal Scots Greys supported the infantry west of the Bois de Hangard and 12th Lancers went to the assistance of 9th Australian Brigade in a counter-attack towards Aubercourt. The 20th Hussars were prepared to help the Canadians, under Brigadier-General J.E.B. Seely, GOC Canadian Cavalry Brigade, against the German 23. and 243. Infanterie-Divisionen.

Amazingly, the Canadian cavalry, ordered to 'engage and delay the enemy', had already struck against Moreuil Wood on 30 March, not as a measured dismounted attack, but by means of mounted charge (Potter 2013: 245). The 23. Infanterie-Division, a Saxon formation, had arrived at Moreuil Wood during the night and soon occupied this long, slender patch of trees, which was 1 mile across at the northern end and much narrower at the south. The Royal Canadian Dragoons made three converging thrusts into the northern end of the wood and were soon seconded by Lord Strathcona's Horse, while the Fort Garry Horse, bringing up the rear, rode south to bring other parts of the wood under fire. According to Seely's own account:

Still mounted, Lt. Gordon Flowerdew's 'C' squadron, Lord Strathcona's Horse, had waited outside of the Wood for the opportunity to advance to the eastern flank. Reaching the north-east corner, Flowerdew spotted two lines of Germans, each numbering about sixty men, with machine guns at their centres and their flanks, advancing to reinforce the Wood. Immediately, Flowerdew 'wheeled his four troops into line, and with a wild shout, a hundred yards in front of his men, charged down on the long thin column of Germans.'

Their sabres drawn, Flowerdew's squadron burst through both lines of the enemy, wheeled about, and then charged on them again, with decimating effect. After the second charge, the enemy broke into retreat. At some point in this desperate melee, Lt. Flowerdew was fatally wounded. (Seely 1933: 303)



The German Army on the Western Front retained small numbers of mounted cavalry in 1918, such as these *Husaren*, but not in the numbers fielded by the Entente armies. Both riders and horses wear gas masks; the lance pennants initially employed in 1914 have long disappeared. (Universal History Archive/ UIG via Getty Images)



This painting by Alfred Munnings (1878–1959), titled *Charge of Flowerdew's Squadron*, commemorates the action at Moreuil Wood on 30 March 1918 that won Lieutenant G.M. Flowerdew the Victoria Cross. (The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo)

Hauptmann Freiherr von Falkenstein, fighting with the Saxon 2. Grenadier-Regiment 'Kaiser Wilhelm' Nr. 101, was as amazed as anybody when he witnessed the charge from a different perspective:

Suddenly a body of Canadian cavalry came riding down upon the left flank of the battalion, actually against No.7 Company, riding partly through and partly past the fringe of the wood. There were some seventy horsemen, and it seems that they hardly expected to find our front line so close to the edge of the wood, and, in some measure hidden by the wisps of mist, they came on almost at a walk. The Grenadiers were thus given time to open a well-aimed fire at short range and so drove back the enemy who suffered a severe loss. (Quoted in Potter 2013: 251)

Lieutenant Gordon M. Flowerdew was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. Lieutenant Frederick M.W. Harvey, who had been ordered to dismount and cover the charge with his troop, was awarded the Military Cross.

While the Canadians gained a temporary hold on Moreuil Wood the Germans had not given up, as the 243. Infanterie-Division reinforced the German line, and the sequence of attack and counter-attack continued for some time.

Rifle Wood, 1 April 1918

MAP KEY

- 1 0700hrs:** Canadian cavalry forces continue to defend a foothold in Moreuil Wood, having charged GR 101 (23. Division) the previous morning.
- 2 0852hrs:** British and Canadian horse artillery commence an eight-minute preparatory barrage on Rifle Wood.
- 3 0900hrs:** Brigadier-General Seely's British and Canadian cavalry begin their attack on Rifle Wood, crossing the Luce stream with the British in the lead and the Canadians in support.
- 4 c.0920hrs:** German machine guns enfilade the 20th Hussars. A critical situation for the British is averted as Captain Hall takes direct charge of the three platoons.
- 5 1100hrs:** By this time, Canadian forces supported by two of the three platoons of 20th Hussars have cleared Rifle Wood. Few Germans escaped death or capture as artillery bombardments by both sides intensified control problems amid the trees.
- 6 1130hrs:** At the conclusion of the battle, elements of the 23. Infanterie-Division overlap those of the 243. Infanterie-Division, echoing the confusion of divisions that characterized the German conduct of the fight for Rifle Wood.

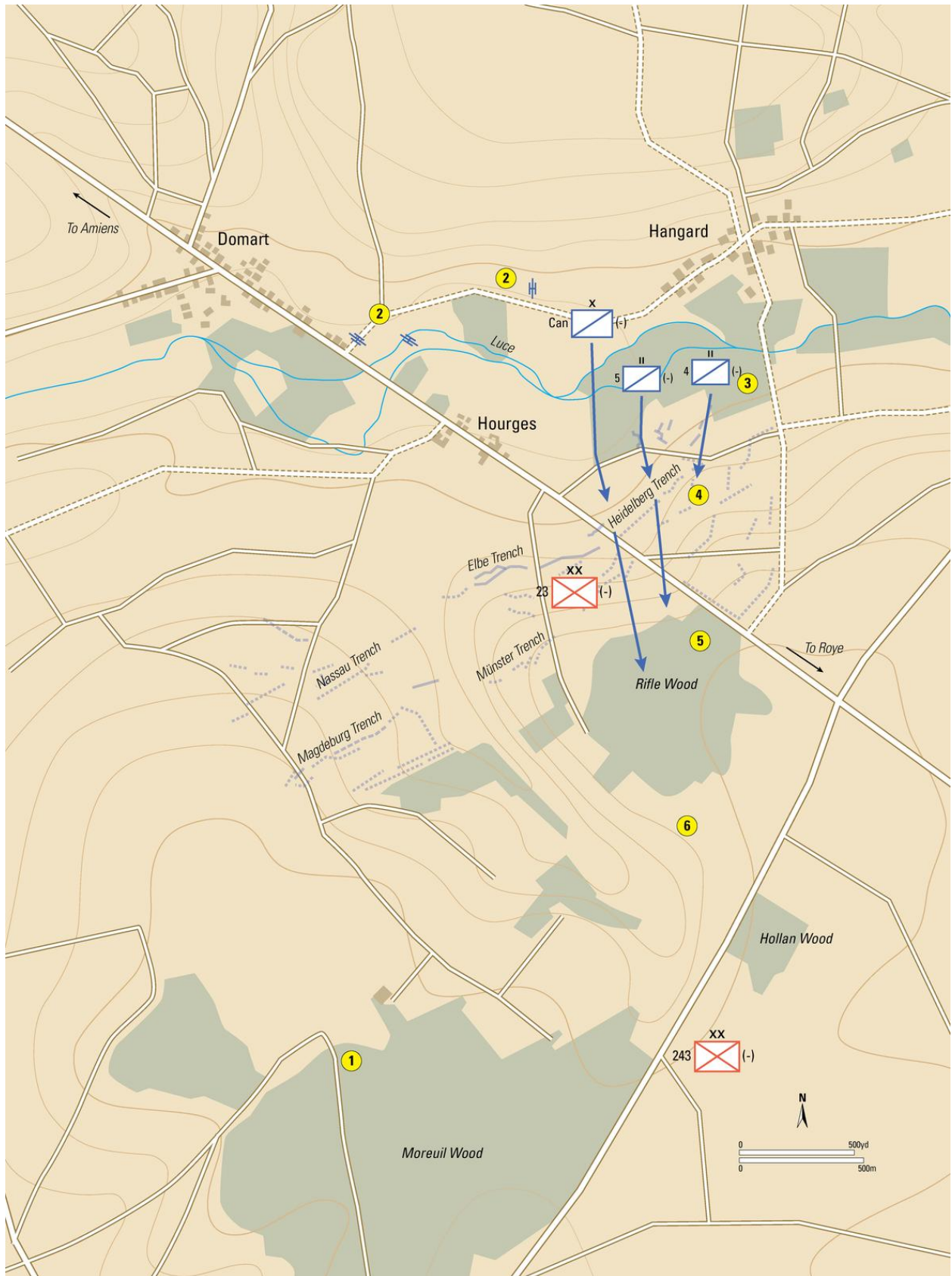
Battlefield environment

Rifle Wood was a small action by World War I standards, but it was both unusual and significant. Its importance was that it checked, in at least one place, the German advance of spring 1918, thus making the German capture of Amiens less likely. The action was novel in that it saw cavalry being used in an infantry role, beating a hitherto successful enemy at a time when mounted troops were seeking new battlefield roles.

While Rifle (Dodo) Wood was small, it formed part of an extensive belt of wooded country across an axis of German advance. Though the action was fought in good weather and

visibility, woodland impeded observation of long-range targets, and the valley of the Luce stream provided cover for units advancing on the wood. Trees and the propensity for targets to appear and disappear led to close-range fighting and attack and counter-attack in confined spaces.

Rain on days prior to the battle made for wet ground, but little extensive mud. The Luce stream was shallow and fordable, a more troublesome obstacle being the wire fence on its bank. Bringing the advance of several German divisions to a halt would take the efforts of both British and Canadian forces, mounted and dismounted, over several days.



Rifle Wood (also known to the French as Dodo Wood) lay just 1 mile to the north and slightly east of Moreuil Wood and was held by two German battalions, giving German troops direct observation of Amiens and the Paris Railway. Officers of the British Army's 2nd and 3rd Cavalry divisions met at Rouvrel to determine strategy for a dismounted attack on Rifle Wood at 0300hrs on 1 April. Seely was to lead the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and the 4th and 5th Cavalry brigades in the action, while Lieutenant-Colonel Robert W. Paterson took direct charge of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. It was decided that Rifle Wood should be attacked from the north and north-west under cover of artillery and machine-gun fire. A three-wave assault was planned, with 4th Cavalry Brigade acting as the first wave, forming a flank from the northern edge of the wood to the watercourse. The 5th Cavalry Brigade would advance as the second wave, capturing the front edge of the wood. Finally, the Canadian Cavalry Brigade would proceed as the third wave, advancing through the wood and clearing it of enemy troops. XIX Corps arranged artillery support, and every brigade supplied a machine-gun troop for the operation.

INTO COMBAT

Brigadier-General Pitman insisted on a 0900hrs start time to enable the cavalry to reconnoitre a proper route of advance in daylight. The ground was wet from recent rain, but visibility good. As Captain Darling related: 'The 20th were to take part in the attack on the left wing. The objective was a ridge sloping up from the Luce stream, which obstacle had to be crossed first. On the ridge was the wood, the objective of the left wing of the attack including the left of the wood and some open ground outside it' (Darling 1923: 101).

The first wave was composed of 4th Dismounted Battalion, and included platoons of the Royal Scots Greys, but lacked 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers), which had been detached. The second wave was composed of soldiers of the 20th Hussars, who were to come up on the right of the first wave. The 20th Hussars 'company' was just 138 men, arranged in three 'platoons' with Lieutenants Taylor, Austin and Fairbrother leading the platoons and Captain Hall in command. The other ranks were armed with SMLE rifles, supported by a few Hotchkiss light machine guns; Hall carried a Spanish-made revolver obtained hastily from a French retailer in Amiens, as his usual sidearm was with the baggage. Hall's new revolver was probably an Astra type, that firm having supplied many thousands of pistols to Entente

forces. The Canadian 'dismounted battalion' formed the third wave of the attack, being intended to pass through the other troops once battle was joined.

The newly assembled force rode to the front line at a trot to enable the men to reach Pine Wood without exhaustion. When they reached the start point, they dismounted and sent their mounts back to Senechat Wood with handlers. The attack was preceded by an eight-minute artillery barrage from the Canadian and British horse artillery, beginning at 0852hrs. At 0900hrs, the men of 4th and 5th Cavalry brigades advanced, supported by Hotchkiss fire. The 20th Hussars made slow progress initially, because, as Darling explained (1923: 102), their advance entailed crossing the Luce stream. This required moving along a wire fence in single file, though happily this occurred in a depression out of sight of the enemy.

Now moving up onto the right of the first wave, the 20th Hussars crossed a lane and into enemy view. The Germans immediately opened fire with enfilading machine guns and a number of the 20th Hussars were hit. Among the casualties were Taylor, Austin and Fairbrother, all of whom were wounded. Captain Hall was now the only 20th Hussars officer remaining unhurt; but brandishing his revolver, urged the men onward and rushed into Rifle Wood. Given that the dismounted cavalry were determined and outnumbered the Germans to their immediate front, the 20th Hussars overcame the opposition in 'hand to hand' fighting, with Hall reported to have 'accounted for more than one of the enemy' with his Spanish revolver (Darling 1923: 102). With the Royal Scots Greys doing equally well to the left, the dismounted men of 20th Hussars consolidated their gain, as the Canadians followed the plan and moved through and deeper into the wood.

Taking stock of his strength, Hall quickly detached one of his platoons to assist the Canadians, and later a second was sent up as reinforcement. Supported by the 20th Hussars, the Canadians now fought their way right through to the other side of Rifle Wood, with heavy hand-to-hand fighting continuing until the southern part of the wood was gained and consolidated for the British and Canadians. Many of the remaining Germans were reported in the brigade war diary as 'slaughtered' by the Canadians' Hotchkiss light machine guns. While units had difficulties maintaining contact with each other, 'many Germans surrendered both themselves and their machine guns'.

Max Bauer

Born in Quedlinburg, Saxony, on 31 January 1869, Max Hermann Bauer abandoned his medical studies in Berlin to join the German Army in 1888, and was commissioned into the heavy artillery in 1889. From 1898 he served on the artillery testing commission, before being given command of an artillery battery as a *Hauptmann*. After serving as an observer during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), Bauer was taken into the mobilization branch of the General Staff in 1908; he became a protégé of Ludendorff and a leading 'brain' of the General Staff.

As a *Major* and head of Section II Bauer became responsible for heavy artillery, mortars and fortresses early in World War I, and was awarded the *Pour le Mérite* and an honorary doctorate. Instrumental in the development of poison gases and 'shock'-troop tactics, Bauer strongly supported the rise of the Hindenburg–Ludendorff duumvirate and opposed an early peace. When French and American troops supported by armour successfully counter-attacked German forces during the Second Battle of the Marne (15–18 July 1918) and the battle of Soissons (18–22 July 1918), Bauer concluded that the war was lost, but continued to lobby for Ludendorff to be placed in charge of Germany.

A leading member of the group that mounted the failed Kapp Putsch on 13 March 1920, Bauer fled Germany and worked as an international military consultant, only returning in 1925. Officially serving as Chiang Kai-shek's economics adviser, Bauer was clandestinely involved in military training and intelligence in China until his controversial death from smallpox on 6 May 1929.

Rifle Wood was a surprising victory for dismounted cavalry attacking an enemy in good positions, supported by machine guns, in broad daylight. Three NCOs of 20th Hussars, Jim Potts, Jack Prince and 'Crocker' Williams,

later received the Military Medal, specifically for ‘bombing’ actions, an unusual distinction for cavalry.

Walter Hall

Born on 10 September 1891 in South Yarra, Australia, Walter D’Arcy Hall was the son of a former banker and mine director. Hall moved to England aged four and was educated at Eton and Sandhurst, being commissioned into the 20th Hussars in 1911.

Hall was well known to the regimental historian Captain John C. Darling, having served under him in B Sqn earlier in World War I, and during his military career was awarded multiple decorations including the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre.

During June–August 1915, Hall was seconded to the Royal Flying Corps, serving as an observer in No. 5 Squadron.

Hastily recalled from leave, Hall led the 20th Hussars dismounted detachment at Rifle Wood. During the action he commanded Lieutenants Taylor, Austin and Fairbrother, each of whom led a platoon. The regiment’s valiant conduct at Rifle Wood despite suffering heavy casualties was recognized by General Henry S. Rawlinson, GOC Fourth Army, who praised the officers and men of 2nd Cavalry Division involved in various dismounted actions during the war’s closing months. Ending the war as a lieutenant-colonel, Hall was twice a Conservative Member of Parliament for Brecon and Radnor (1924–29 and 1931–35). A renowned game hunter, he died in Salisbury, Wiltshire, on 22 January 1980.

Rifle Wood, 1 April 1918



British view: This is the view of a soldier of the 20th Hussars at about 0920hrs, as the dismounted cavalry formations come into view of the German defenders of Rifle Wood and nearby trenches. While our soldier can see the backs of men in the section ahead of him wearing cavalry equipment and attempting to engage enemy troops whose heads can fleetingly be seen bobbing up and down in Heidelberg Trench, the rest of the scene is almost an 'empty battlefield'. German machine-gun fire has commenced from the flank and a few rifle shots from the front are inflicting casualties, and a few artillery shells burst at the edge of the wood. Yet this was an early crisis of the action, as the British cannot see where the bulk of the enemy are, and with the three 20th Hussars platoon commanders wounded, Captain Hall has to take charge and urge on the men before their morale is shaken.



German view: This is the battlefield as seen by a member of a German picquet on the edge of Rifle Wood. The British, in the nearest line, have suddenly come into view having emerged from the valley of the Luce stream and crossed a lane, with the Canadian dismounted cavalry, also in an extended line of platoons, coming on behind them. Captain Hall of the 20th Hussars is a tiny figure, just identifiable with the central platoon of his troops, pistol raised above his head. Our observer can see a comrade in the foreground and both men have just opened fire with their Gew 98 rifles, but other than this the German defence is limited, including only one MG 08/15 light-machine-gun team and a handful of riflemen concealed in Heidelberg Trench, visible slightly downslope to the right. Putting only the minimum number of troops in the 'shop window' was good tactical practice, and casualties have been inflicted, but the few Germans here will not be enough to hold back the British and Canadians, who will soon be storming the edge of the wood.



Dismounted British cavalry take a break. They wear greatcoats, steel helmets and ankle boots with spurs. Their equipment includes small box respirator (SBR) bags and Pattern 1903 leather bandoliers; additional ammunition and other items are carried on the horses.



German assault troops, carrying distinctive shorter Mauser carbines and slung long-handled spades, move forward amid smoke. Close examination of the figure nearest the camera shows a variant of the *Stahlhelm* with cut-outs over the ears, introduced on a limited basis in 1918. (Philippe Clement/Arterra/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

According to Captain Darling's account, gathered from eyewitnesses, 20th Hussars suffered three other ranks killed, and three officers and 39 men wounded, plus one man missing. Later accounts interpret this as 'heavy loss' (Pharo-Tomlin 2002: 93), as perhaps it was, since this equated to over 30 per cent of those present. Nevertheless, this was not the whole story, as Commonwealth War Graves Commission records mention 11 soldiers of 20th Hussars who died on 1 April 1918. All of these were other ranks, being eight privates and three corporals. The oldest recorded fatality was Corporal

William C. Smith, aged 38, a Londoner who had served in the Second Anglo-Boer War. Two of the privates killed were only 19, while Corporal Reginald J. Haylock of Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire, was 29. All but two of the bodies were lost and their names are recorded on the Pozières Memorial. The remains of Privates Arthur N. Cox and Albert E.P. Carpenter were recovered and interred at Moreuil Communal Cemetery a couple of miles from the battlefield. It is likely that the larger number of dead, as now known, is accounted for by men 'died of wounds'.

The Canadian Cavalry Brigade war diary refers to heavy loss crossing the 'open area' between Hourges and Rifle Wood, and difficulties traversing the wood owing to thick undergrowth. The Canadian cavalry suffered 303 casualties at Moreuil Wood, and a further 175 at Rifle Wood. Towards the end of the action, just after 1100hrs, many of the Germans still in Rifle Wood tried to surrender, but their own artillery now brought down a bombardment, killing friend and foe alike. Altogether, the dismounted cavalry captured 121 prisoners, 13 German machine guns, one French machine gun and two Lewis guns. Total German casualties were thought to be high, particularly due to covering artillery fire from the British and Canadian horse artillery. Seely estimated that German losses were at least as great as those taken by the dismounted cavalry (Potter 2013: 255–56). When 5th Cavalry Brigade was withdrawn to Bois L'Abbe the next day, 20th Hussars had been reduced to 13 officers and 150 men, with 245 horses, the survival of the latter being accounted for by their use as transport rather than battle steeds.

The Selle

20 October 1918

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

Though Rifle Wood and other counter-attacks put spokes into Ludendorff's plans, and Operation *Michael* drew to a close after the First Battle of Villers-Bretonneux (30 March–5 April 1918), there was no end to German efforts to advance. Despite increasing casualties and diminishing returns, the Spring Offensive continued with Operation *Georgette* on the Lys River, aiming to capture Ypres and force the British back on the Channel ports. Haig for one took this threat extremely seriously, issuing his famous 'backs to the wall' order on 11 April:

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment. (Sheffield & Bourne 2005: 402)

With the Portuguese contingent overrun and British 40th Division collapsing, the situation appeared desperate indeed, but the Entente lines flexed backward and held near Estaires, and the southern flank of General Sir Herbert Plumer's Second Army withdrew. Finally, the Germans were held at Kemmel and Béthune: the attackers gained about 14.5km (9 miles) here, but were ground to a halt. Casualties to both sides stood at about 340,000 for the year already by the end of April 1918. With Operation *Georgette* winding down, German attention shifted to the Aisne sector, and a new *Blücher–Yorck* offensive, aiming between Soissons and Reims at the end of May. The Germans reached the Marne River against weak British defence, and French units massed too far forward in their positions. There were fears that German

troops would reach Paris, and now Ludendorff hoped Operation *Gneisenau* could extend westward gains. Again, 14.5km (9 miles) of territory were seized by German troops, but, with French and American forces fighting hard, a counter-attack involving 150 tanks caught the Germans off guard, and Operation *Gneisenau* was abruptly halted.

While the German High Command had intended to launch another big attack against the British, they were sidetracked with the French, and now launched the *Marneschutz–Reims* offensive, a so-called *Friedensturm* (‘Peace attack’), intended to end the war. This failed to deal with French battle zones, however, and with air superiority on the side of the Entente, *Marneschutz–Reims* fell apart. The French now began counter-attacks and much of the territory gained by the Germans was relinquished.

Arguably, the tide only turned decisively with the first day of the battle of Amiens (8–11 August 1918), referred to by Ludendorff as the ‘Black Day of the German Army’. While the US Army had no time to become as skilled as armies that had been fighting for four years, Ludendorff’s nightmare scenario was nevertheless coming true. The conveyor belt of men across the Atlantic had finally succeeded in putting a viable mass for full-scale offensives onto French shores by late summer, and the Americans attacked at Saint-Mihiel on 12 September.



This German soldier wears *Sappenpanzer* trench armour and carries stick grenades. The *Sappenpanzer* consisted of a silicon–nickel steel breastplate with three hanging plates, designed to be resistant against smaller shell fragments, or medium- to long-range bullet strikes. Hung over the shoulders, it could also be reversed to cover the back, and was issued mainly to sentries and machine-gunners whose duties might mean exposure to enemy fire.

A Territorial unit, 5th Battalion, The East Lancashire Regiment, was part of 42nd (East Lancashire) Division, the first Territorial division deployed overseas (to Egypt and Gallipoli) earlier in the war, before arrival on the Western Front in March 1917. As of October 1917, the divisional commander was the remarkable Major-General Arthur Solly-Flood, previously

Commander of Third Army School and who went with a party of British officers to investigate French methods at their IV Armée training school at Châlons-sur-Marne in November 1916. On his return he worked with the French approach to develop SS143, 'Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action', arguably the most important British infantry tactical document of the second half of the war, and later became Director of Training to the BEF as a whole: for his 42nd Division he also compiled a new set of instructional notes. Solly-Flood was wounded in France, mentioned in despatches seven times, awarded brevets of lieutenant-colonel and colonel, and was awarded both the CB and CMG. Sadly, Solly-Flood's reputation as tactician and trainer has been eclipsed by that of Lieutenant-General Sir Ivor Maxse, who became Inspector General of Training in June 1918.

In 42nd Division, 5th East Lancashire (under Lieutenant-Colonel Oliver C. Clare) was part of 126th (East Lancashire) Infantry Brigade, along with 8th and 10th Manchester. The paper strength of 5th East Lancashire was a respectable 870 other ranks and 44 officers as of 1 October 1918, but 'trench strength' was only 483 other ranks and 34 officers. The 'absent' troops were deployed to training schools, both learning and teaching, or used as signallers, but 144 personnel were on leave; and one officer and 25 men formed the divisional burial party.

By October 1918, 5th East Lancashire had already performed outstanding service in the 'Hundred Days' of British advances leading up to the Armistice. During the attack on the Hindenburg Line, 42nd Division played a prominent part, breaching the defences during the battle of the Canal du Nord on 27 September. Captain Harold W. Dick, OC A Coy, was recommended for the DSO and field-promoted to major. Following this success, the pursuit of the enemy was carried out with such vigour that the Germans were unable to make a determined stand. Third Army's advance in Picardy culminated at the Selle River in October 1918, and 126th Infantry Brigade led the divisional advance over footbridges laid by divisional Royal Engineers on the nights of 17–19 October.

The Hessians of the 25. Infanterie-Division had been on the Selle front for nearly a week before the battle, in positions described as the *Hermannstellung* (Hermann Position), and while this was not a fully developed defensive zone, the troops were prepared and disposed for action. The three-battalion regiment directly in the path of the Lancastrians was

Infanterie-Regiment 'Kaiser Wilhelm' (2. Großherzoglich Hessisches) Nr. 116.

The adjutant of III./IR 116 was Hauptmann Albert Hiß, author of the 1924 regimental history; this is a key source from the German point of view, especially because III./IR 116 was deployed as a *Kampfbataillon* (battle battalion) in forward positions facing the Selle River. One company of the regiment was held as a *Stoßkompanie* (counter-attack 'shock company') in a sunken lane, while 6. and 7./IR 116, supported by two MG 08 machine guns, defended the railway. Patrols from 9. and 10./IR 116 came forward along the Selle regimental front to observe the enemy. A platoon of 5./IR 116 deployed four MG 08 machine guns and four *Tankgewehre* (anti-tank rifles) in the sunken lane between Solesmes and Amerval, and two more platoons with four MG 08s and two anti-tank rifles were in the lane between Solesmes and Richemont.



Pattern 1907 bayonets fixed to their SMLE rifles, these cheery British soldiers await the enemy behind a barricade in Bailleul, April 1918. The town would be almost entirely destroyed during Operation *Georgette*, falling to German troops in mid-April. (Trinity Mirror/Mirrorpix/Alamy Stock Photo)



German field-artillery teams advance during the battle of Soissons in July 1918. (Mondadori via Getty Images)

The 42nd Division's plan for a night attack on 19/20 October was surprisingly complex and demanding. The battalions of 126th Infantry Brigade were to advance in four waves behind a barrage lifting 100yd every three minutes, and between the objective lines, progress of the barrage would slow to 100yd every five minutes. Perhaps because of recent creditable performances, 5th East Lancashire, on the right of the line, was given a major role. Its B Coy with six sections in 'arrowhead' formations was directed to the railway cutting (the 'Blue Line' objective), with one platoon detailed to seize Bellevue Farm near the crossroads a few yards west of the railway, mop up the crossroads, then work from left to right and form a defensive flank on the spur just beyond the railway. According to the battalion war diary, C Coy and D Coy, initially forming a second wave, were to advance in 'extended order' and carry the advance to the 'Green Line', passing through the 'ravine' that stretched diagonally between the two objectives. D Coy then formed the third wave, and, after mopping up at the ravine, was to carry on in a line of sections in single file, and extend to either flank of the leading companies. Here, D Coy would form 'fighting patrols' to clear the flanks and establish contact with 10th Manchester and 5th Division. Referred to as the 'fourth wave', two companies of 8th Manchester, one each to back 5th East

Lancashire and 10th Manchester, were intended to assist in mopping up and support the two battalions in their primary tasks.

The Selle, 20 October 1918

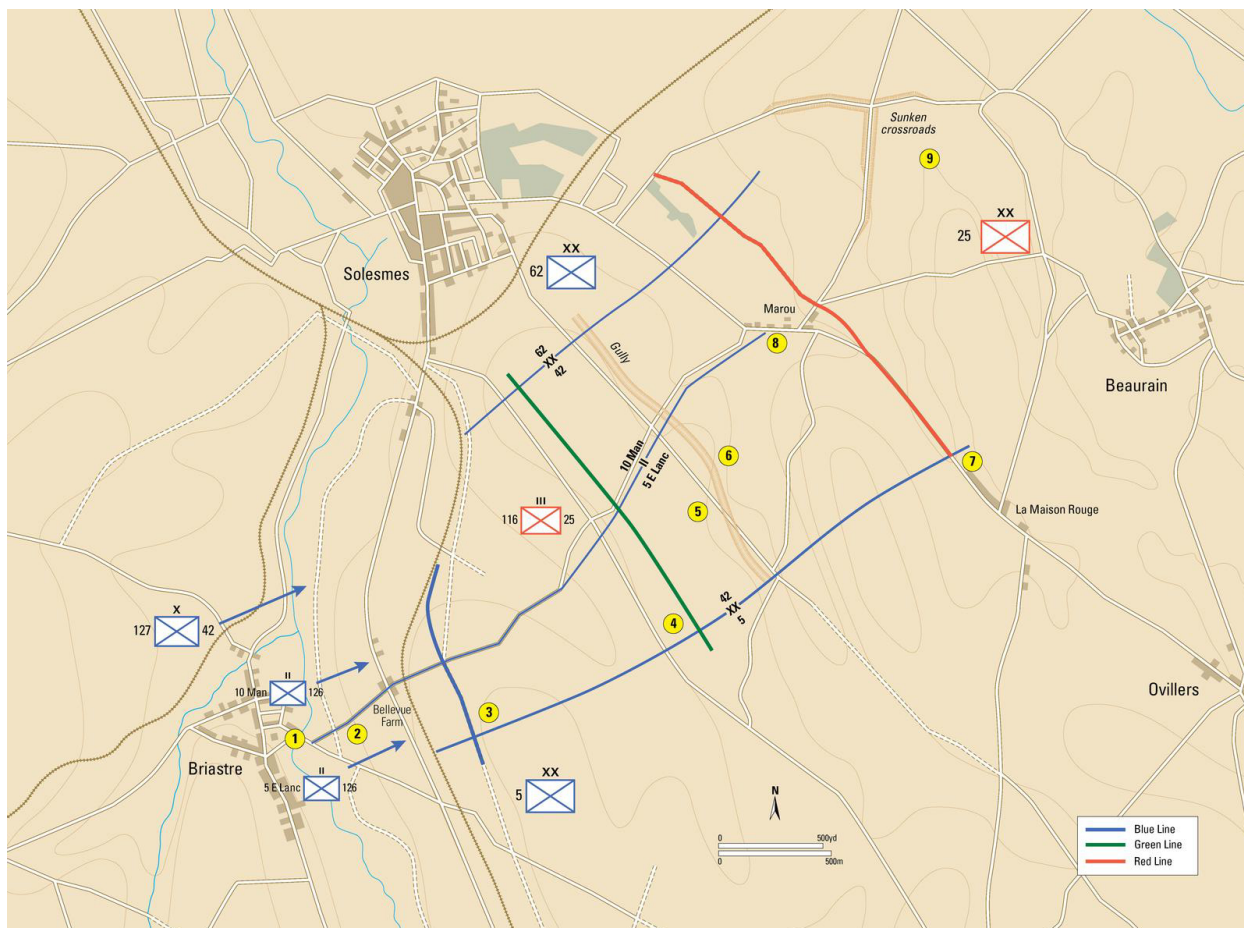
MAP KEY

- 1 0100hrs:** 5th East Lancashire, with D Coy, 8th Manchester, under command, is in the attack position.
- 2 0200hrs:** The British artillery barrage begins and the two attacking battalions of 126th Infantry Brigade begin their advance. The attackers are hit by a German artillery barrage as they move towards the German positions along the railway line.
- 3 c.0230hrs:** Captain Wintle, OC B Coy, 5th East Lancashire, fires a red Very light to report the capture of the first British objective, the Blue Line.
- 4 c.0315hrs:** C Coy and D Coy, 5th East Lancashire, continue the British advance, capturing the 'Gully' position and then the second British objective, the Green Line. Both company commanders are hit and wounded.
- 5 c.0345hrs:** Two platoons of 8th Manchester are brought up to reinforce 5th East Lancashire's flanks.
- 6 0700hrs:** The three battalions of 127th Infantry Brigade advance through 126th Infantry Brigade.
- 7 c.0715hrs:** Major Dick and Second Lieutenant Holdsworth of 5th East Lancashire take nine men and capture three German machine guns that are holding up the British advance.
- 8 c.0730hrs:** Lieutenant-Colonel Panton, CO 5th Manchester, is hit and wounded; Private Wilkinson successfully relays the news to Brigade and Major Tickler takes command of the battalion.
- 9 c.0900hrs:** The troops of 42nd Division achieve their specified objectives. The German retreat is not a rout, however, and it is 23 October before the British advance can be recommenced.

Battlefield environment

The Selle River was narrow, but ran along a steep-sided valley. This obstacle had been bridged by British engineers before the battle, but remained something of a hindrance in bringing up large bodies of men or bulky stores; conversely, it provided useful cover. The German forces occupied what they dubbed the *Hermannstellung* (Hermann Position), which was not a fully developed battle zone, but did make good use of natural features, contours, sunken lanes, some new trenches and particularly shell holes, some of which were converted into machine-gun posts and anti-tank nests.

Rainfall in the hours before zero hour was an annoyance for both sides, and the ground was muddy in places, though the landscape did not become the quagmire associated with the major battles of attrition of earlier years. While villages and hamlets were wholly or partially destroyed, they remained identifiable, and were used as strongpoints.



Following the initial 0200hrs attack, 127th (Manchester) Infantry Brigade was to come into action at 0700hrs, advancing through 126th Infantry Brigade, behind a slow artillery barrage advancing at a rate of 100yd every five minutes as far as the Red Line, which lay almost 1,500yd to the north-east at the hamlet of Marou. After a pause of 15–30 minutes, the British advance was to resume to the Brown Line, to seize the sunken crossroads on the hill between Marou and Romeries at a slightly faster pace. The maximum advance of 126th and 127th Infantry brigades was 3,000–4,000yd, but even then there was a contingency plan for the 125th (Lancashire Fusiliers) Infantry Brigade to carry on, should conditions allow.

INTO COMBAT

The 5th East Lancashire attack on the Selle front was well planned. According to the battalion war diary, 126th Infantry Brigade moved forward on the night of 18/19 October with C Coy and D Coy, 5th East Lancashire,

relieving elements of 1/5th Lancashire Fusiliers (125th Infantry Brigade, 42nd Division) and A Coy and B Coy, 5th East Lancashire, taking the place of 16th Royal Warwickshire (13th Infantry Brigade, 5th Division) in a 'Gully', then moving under cover along a sunken lane to start positions, the platoons being well spread out 100yd apart to minimize the effects of German artillery intervention. Guides and reconnaissance parties ensured that the companies were in the correct positions, and bandages were issued so white armbands could be improvised for the coming night assault. Limbers were allotted to support battalion Lewis guns with ammunition as they went forward; and the men were issued with 24 hours' rations and filled their water bottles before moving. 'Warning orders' informed the battalion of the coming attack under darkness, and that 10th Manchester would be on the left of the advance. Major Dick and the intelligence officer, Lieutenant William B. Little DSO, MC, laid out guidance tapes, forward from the battalion headquarters and along the assembly position. Members of the battalion band, who doubled as stretcher-bearers, also moved into position on the line.

Selle was a set-piece attack, and the regimental history has it that the entire battalion was assembled in a large barn to listen to the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel O.C. Clare, explain the plan, as well as conduct both day and night rehearsals (Nicholson 1936: 252). By 0100hrs on 20 October, 5th East Lancashire was in the attack position with its subunits between the Selle River and the railway. D Coy was on the right wing, with C Coy on its immediate left, both in extended order, with two platoons to the fore and a third platoon 30yd behind. B Coy, commanded by Captain Wintle, which had hitherto been holding the front line at the start position, was deputed to advance in section files, the heads of the files being in line with C Coy and D Coy. A Coy, under Captain Henry B. Worswick MC, was drawn up behind the main assault of C Coy and D Coy, again in section files. Worswick's orders were to reinforce the attack on the German-occupied 'Gully' feature, and remain in it once it was taken. D Coy, 8th Manchester, also under 5th East Lancashire orders, had instructions to advance as far as the railway, where the company was to halt and hold that objective; 10th Manchester was on the left, the boundary being a small road.



Soldiers of 1/4th Battalion, The East Lancashire Regiment, in trenches in Belgium, late 1917. Based in Blackburn, this was the regiment's original Territorial battalion, absorbing 2/4th East Lancashire as part of the reorganizations of early 1918. The sergeant in the foreground is using a simple mirror trench periscope attached to the bayonet of his .303in SMLE rifle.



A British artillery team moves at speed, July 1918. (Daily Mirror/Mirrorpix/Mirrorpix via Getty Images)

Drizzling rain had started at dusk, and weather conditions worsened as the night progressed with the men lying out in the dark. While 5th East

Lancashire reached its start positions without mishap, 10th Manchester was not so lucky, its men lying in a wet beet field to the left, and soon several fell casualty to shellfire. While 5th East Lancashire was halted on the start tapes, platoon and section commanders were taken forward to the crest in front where the trees along the road and railway could just be made out, for orientation. At 0200hrs (0300hrs German time) came zero hour:

Our barrage started, the band played the Regimental March and the battalion moved off to the attack. Heavy machine-gun fire from the railway caused about 50 casualties and the enemy put down a barrage just west of the railway. The battalion charged through this with a yell and reached the railway, where hard fighting took place. Many of the enemy fired until our men closed with them and some, who had been missed in the darkness, fired along the railway, taking our men in enfilade. All were soon accounted for, and opposition on the battalion frontage on the railway being overcome, Captain Wintle ... fired a single red Very light in the direction of Battalion Headquarters where it was seen and gave the news – immediately reported to Brigade - that the first and most important objective had been captured. (Nicholson 1936: 254)

Hiß explains that the Germans were ‘surprised’ by the sudden and ferocious artillery bombardment, the attack engaging the ‘whole front of the division’ (Hiß 1924: 204–05). Some British troops went prone and sought cover when 6. and 7./IR 116 sprayed the enemy with machine-gun fire, but within half an hour the attackers made a breakthrough on the 25. Infanterie-Division’s left. The successful 5th East Lancashire drove through behind two of the German companies, and in the *wilden Kämpfgetrummel* (‘wild tumult of battle’) many of the Germans were killed, badly wounded or captured. The East Lancshires then pushed on so that by 0330hrs, 5./IR 116 was being overrun despite the efforts of Vizefeldwebel Bott and his machine-gunners to hold on.

In the next phase of battle, C Coy and D Coy of 5th East Lancashire continued the advance, supported by A Coy. Captain Worswick went with them, firing occasional white Very lights to illuminate German positions. The ‘Gully’ was taken at c.0400hrs, against sparser German opposition than had been anticipated, and two red Very lights were fired to signify taking of the second British objective. But now there was more enfilading fire from German machine guns to the east, and, C Coy being in some confusion, Private Kehoe ran forward. Despite not being a trained Lewis gunner, he helped push forward a platoon by the simple, if highly dangerous, expedient, of ‘walking fire’. Kehoe fired a few rounds intermittently every 25yd or so, before dashing forward again, thus encouraging men behind him to follow up. While IR 116 held on to the best of its ability, the British attack was spirited and included other small acts of bravery and initiative. CSM R.J.

Steele of C Coy took on two of the enemy in a 'rough and tumble fight', shooting one and putting the other out of action with a kick, while Privates Negliss and Chalkley of A Coy, running messages, came across three separate 'cubby holes', overcoming the German occupants in succession and taking eight prisoners (Nicholson 1936: 256).

Thus continued the British advance toward the final objective; but the men on either flank of 5th East Lancashire were now well behind, and the fight was not without cost. The commanders of both C Coy and D Coy, Captain Thomas Bamlett and Lieutenant B. Kenny, were hit and wounded. Major Dick, never far from the epicentre of battle, now brought up two platoons of 8th Manchester. These reinforcements were used to bolster both flanks of 5th East Lancashire, and contact with friendly forces on both wings was thus re-established. Also of significant assistance was Sergeant Samuel R. Lees, commanding a platoon of 10th Manchester, who captured a crater heavily defended by German machine guns and cleared a length of the railway to the left, also taking the initiative to work beyond the divisional boundary. Corporal Martin, with just two men of 10th Manchester, charged a party of the enemy, putting them to flight.

Everything was soon in place for the passage of 127th Infantry Brigade through 126th Infantry Brigade. It was after dawn, with the main objectives secured, that Major Dick again showed his mettle. A nest of German machine guns to the front right of 5th East Lancashire was still operative, and determined likely to be a serious obstacle in the event of further forward movement. Accordingly, Dick hatched a plan with Second Lieutenant Harry Holdsworth to nip out this thorn in the British side. Taking just nine men, they attempted a pincer movement, Holdsworth going with six, and Dick with the remaining three. As the regimental history records: 'Second Lieutenant Holdsworth arrived within striking distance first, and by determined assault captured five of the enemy with three machine guns' (Nicholson 1936: 256).



A British Mk IV 'female' tank in action. The Mk IV weighed 27 tons, and had a crew of eight; the 'female' version was armed with five Lewis guns, the male with two 6-pdr guns and three Lewis guns. Continuing in production to the end of the war, approximately 1,200 were made. (General Photographic Agency/Getty Images)

Shortly afterwards, but on the left of the divisional front, another drama in miniature was working its way to conclusion as 5th Manchester pushed on towards Marou. The battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel William F. Panton, was hit and wounded, and with German machine guns still firing and part of the British barrage falling short, at about 0730hrs Private Alfred R. Wilkinson dashed through 600yd of shot and shell to keep the brigade command informed. As a result, Major William M. Tickler soon stepped in to command 5th Manchester and Wilkinson was recommended for the Victoria Cross, for his 'magnificent courage and complete indifference to danger'. Now promoted lance corporal, Wilkinson was 'gazetted' in January 1919, and given special leave to attend Buckingham Palace for his award at the hand of HM King George V. That July, Wilkinson was part of the battalion colour party at the London victory parade, along with two officers and the regimental quartermaster sergeant.

The regimental history records the casualties of 20 October 1918 as two officers and 13 other ranks killed, and six officers and 109 other ranks wounded (Nicholson 1936: 255–56). According to the battalion war diary, the dead were gathered at battalion headquarters on the morning of the 21st, and 'sewn up in blankets', prior to burial the following afternoon next to the civilian cemetery at Briastre. The dead officers were Second Lieutenants R.D. Sacks (*sic*; actually Rudolf Dinges Sachs) and 22-year-old R. Davenport; the wounded officers were Major Frank V. Rushton, Captain Bamlett, Lieutenant Kenny and three second lieutenants. Commonwealth War

Graves Commission records reveal that 24 men of The East Lancashire Regiment died on 20–21 October, five of whom are recorded as having fallen on 21 October. Given that battalion sources cite no 5th East Lancashire fatalities for the latter date, it appears these men died elsewhere with other battalions of the regiment, fell just after the main attack, or died of wounds received on 20 October.

Capturing a machine-gun nest



According to a plan hatched by Major Harold W. Dick two small detachments were allotted to take a German machine-gun post occupying a shell hole just forward and to the right of 5th East Lancashire's front line, after daylight at about 0715hrs on 20 October 1918. While six other ranks with Second Lieutenant Harry Holdsworth circled stealthily around the back of the Germans, three more, with the major himself, approached

frontally once the enemy troops were engaged from the rear. Our view is that of a private soldier in the major's little group at the denouement of the action.

From here we can see Major Dick advancing with his .455in Enfield revolver drawn, a fallen German of IR 116 at his feet. The major is in service dress with the white-over-red sign of 42nd (East Lancashire) Division on his upper arm, the only other insignia visible from this angle being the small crown rank badge on his shoulder strap. Like some of the other British troops he still has on his improvised white armband, intended to identify friendly troops during the night.

The seven khaki-clad figures advancing towards us from the background are Second Lieutenant Holdsworth (third from left) and his six men. Most carry rifle with fixed bayonet, including Holdsworth. One man, in the middle of the group next to Holdsworth, is a 'bomber'. We can see his web 'grenade waistcoat', and arm raised ready to throw should the remaining Germans not surrender. The whole team are in 'battle order' with small packs on their backs and the small box respirator (SBR) bag on the chest, except the bomber who must contrive to keep his grenades accessible and gas-mask case to one side.

The grey-clad Germans occupy the centre ground, and four of them appear unwounded and likely to be captured together with at least two MG 08/15 light machine guns. Several men have steel helmets with the 'lozenge'-pattern camouflage of green, ochre and reddish-brown outlined in black, as authorized from the summer of 1918. The fallen German in the foreground, hit before he could activate a stick grenade, has shed his headgear to reveal the lining of three fabric pads in leather pockets. Two of the helmeted Germans in the shell hole wear the *Sappenpanzer* trench armour, mainly used by sentries or machine-gunners. Two men (to the left) have grey other ranks' field caps.

An immediate survey of 5th East Lancashire's front located only 22 German dead, but 300 prisoners, these being of 'better physique and appearance' than any encountered since August, and apparently 'picked troops', according to the battalion war diary. The writer of the 5th East

Lancashire war diary noted that the prisoners' uniforms had red distinctions and 'KW' on the shoulder straps, this almost certainly being a reference to the red monograms of IR 116. For once, however, the damage done to the enemy was seriously underestimated, for Hiß recorded serious losses to officers and senior NCOs throughout the regiment, as well as a large number of men killed, died of wounds or captured. Hiß notes that of the IR 116's *Leutnanten der Reserve*, Braune, Dobrowa, Jakob, Leberwurst and Schulze were all 'missing' immediately after the battle, as was battalion medical officer Dr Wohlmüt. Offiziersstellvertreter (deputy officers) Schiffer and Schaarman were similarly missing, as were 'many other trusty fighters' (Hiß 1924: 206–07). Leutnant der Reserve Plümer's 5./IR 116 fought on against the odds, with many men, including Plümer himself, wounded, until at dawn the nucleus of the company withdrew to friendly artillery positions just west of Beaurain. Mortally wounded, Vizefeldwebel Georg yielded himself to the British before expiring; and III./IR 116 received another heavy blow when a machine-gun platoon suffered a direct artillery strike. Faring somewhat better, 9. and 12./IR 116 extracted themselves and fell back towards Beaurain. Following the regiment's disbandment after the Armistice, Hiß pronounced the unit 'dead' (1924: 219–20).



A German field-gun crew in action near a hedge line, 1918. Despite the widespread use of motorized transport, both sides relied heavily on horses for mobility, logistics and other functions throughout World War I. (Interim Archives/Getty Images)



Grasping his SMLE rifle, this lightly kitted British soldier shows the strain of combat during 1918. (SeM/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

As a whole, 42nd Division struck a significant blow on the Selle, claiming a total of 927 prisoners, three field guns, 102 machine guns, nine trench mortars and 22 anti-tank rifles taken during 20–23 October. A total of 515 German dead were recovered, the majority from the 25. Infanterie-Division but with a few from the 18. Infanterie-Division. Against this, 42nd Division conceded 138 dead and 707 wounded from all units under command. Many of the 5th East Lancashire wounded were recovered promptly and brought before Captain E.R. Greville RAMC, the battalion medical officer. Greville and his team worked themselves as far forward as possible, and toiled on men from various units, packing them off to casualty clearing as soon as possible.

Analysis

The infantry battle on the Western Front changed dramatically between August 1914 and November 1918. A period of ‘open warfare’ during the ‘battles of the frontiers’ soon gave way to ‘trench warfare’, arguably commencing before the end of 1914. This three-year phase was not devoid of innovation with, for example, improvement of artillery tactics and hardware; the introduction of gas, tanks and flamethrowers, as well as new fighter and bomber aircraft; improvements to physical defences; the growing use of light machine guns and mortars; and the evolution of infantry tactics and battle deployments, particularly in 1916 and 1917. Most of the elements of ‘shock’ and ‘storm’ tactics were in place before 1918, and while the Germans led in some aspects, the Entente forces were also taking steps in similar directions, as for example with French and British reorganization in ‘mixed’ platoons. The basic building blocks of battle, formerly battalions and companies, shrank progressively until individual infantry sections, machine-gun units and tank crews became of account to success or failure.

What was really different about the infantry battle in 1918 was the sudden influx of German troops from the East, gradually being balanced by a US troop build-up, and synthesis of existing elements to create a unified system, as typified by the German General Staff’s *Der Angriff im Stellungskrieg* of January 1918. The British contribution included artillery innovations and development of both tanks and tank tactics. While General der Infanterie Hutier’s role has been massively exaggerated, the contribution of Oberst Georg Bruchmüller has also been overestimated. Creeping barrages and short rapid ‘whirlwind’ or ‘hurricane’ barrages, had both been used by Entente artillery before 1918, and registration, as well as fire by range tables and maps, pre-dated even World War I, at least experimentally. Bruchmüller was also influenced by others, notably Arthur Bille, formerly an instructor at the heavy artillery school, who was killed in action as a *General der Fußartillerie* on 1 January 1916.



The German tank 'Wotan'. This vehicle was an A7V, the designation being derived from 'Allgemeines Kriegsdepartement, 7. Abteilung, Verkehrswesen', meaning 'General War Department, 7th Branch, Transportation'. Having neglected early tank development in favour of increased munitions and gun manufacture, Germany made belated attempts to catch up with British and French efforts. The result was barely 20 A7V machines before the end of the war, supplemented by a greater number of captured enemy machines, and a couple of experimental models. Five A7Vs were in action near Saint-Quentin in March 1918; 13 at Villers-Bretonneux in late April (the first ever tank-vs-tank action), and more were used at Amiens. Like the rest of its class, 'Wotan' was a slow and heavy vehicle, mounting a 5.7cm bow cannon and six MG 08 machine guns. (Gircke/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

GERMAN EFFECTIVENESS

Neither the Germans nor the British had intended for 'shock' or 'storm' troops to become an elite force. As early as 1916, the German High Command decided that the *Sturmabteilung* should not be separate from existing formations, but rather training organizations for the infantry as a whole, and where *Sturmtruppen* were deployed in action this was to be done sparingly for specific ends in securing a key objective or reinforcing other infantry.

The dramatic opening of the Spring Offensive saw the apogee of German 'shock' tactics, met by British defensive systems largely based on pre-existing German methods. More ground was gained by the Germans than was previously possible, but British forces were not dealt a death-blow, nor did mere capture of territory prove decisive. The ground taken was often in the form of salients, and these greatly increased the length of the line needing to be defended when the Entente forces eventually regained numerical advantage. Even with much-improved methods, dramatically demonstrated at

Manchester Hill in March 1918, attacking proved as expensive as ever, both in terms of human lives and matériel.

Ludendorff's gamble was a miscalculation in more than one way as he lacked war-winning strategic objectives to go with the tactical skills of his troops. He was also incorrect in assuming that attacking would lead to fewer losses than defending; perhaps he was misled because defending on the Somme, at Arras and at Ypres had been so costly for the German Army. Despite setbacks, of which Rifle Wood on 1 April was only one small example, Ludendorff continued to attack on one sector after another, but was halted repeatedly. The German forces on the Western Front fell from five to four million men. Yet it was only when British and Imperial troops, supported by the French, made their own counter-stroke at Amiens in August that Ludendorff was shocked into a radical change of approach.

BRITISH EFFECTIVENESS

The term 'learning curve' has frequently been applied to British Army methods in World War I, and most particularly to the Somme period of 1916. The combats of 1918 are suggestive that this 'curve' also applied to the last 18 months of the war, and that tactical lessons were learned from both the French and Germans as well as from British practical experience. The British defensive system of spring 1918 was based on German methods; the organization of minor infantry units on French methods. The use of British and Canadian cavalry as dismounted assault troops at Rifle Wood was a fascinating experiment at a time when a desperate British Army was willing to try almost anything to stop the German offensive. Yet arguably this was less 'new', and more a new twist on old methods. 'Dragoons' who rode to battle but dismounted to fight with firearms had existed in the 17th century, and 'mounted infantry' fought widely in the Second Anglo-Boer War. There were also experiments pairing cavalry with tanks, some of which were new models of faster 'Whippet' tanks deployed as early as spring 1918.

The British set their hearts against 'star turns' from the outset, not wishing to create a two-tier army, and (also from 1916) sought to unify training and tactics across volunteers and conscripts alike. In both instances, dedicated 'schools' and training areas were used to bring troops up to speed with specialized weapons and new tactics. Yet the whole British outlook ran contrary to the establishment of 'storm' units, or 'star turns' of any sort. At times it seemed as though the British General Staff, having made creditable

efforts to understand both French and German tactics, were then ashamed lest anybody think they were copying someone else's 'homework'. GHQ was also reluctant to go far down the path of *Auftragstaktik* (mission-led tactics), perhaps with good reason because when poorly applied they could lead to dissipation of effort or loss of control, as had occasionally occurred for the Germans. Individual British combat formations took more nuanced views, particularly in retrospect. Some unit histories recognized that similar techniques were being used, and very occasionally even referred to themselves as 'storm troops'. Moreover, acknowledged or not, British and German methods were convergent. This was illustrated in the short bombardments at Rifle Wood and on the Selle; in pushing attacking troops unobserved through a narrow gaps, as at Rifle Wood, and generally in giving specific tasks to smaller units such as companies and platoons.

If anything demonstrated that the British infantry had caught up with the latest methods it was the Hundred Days ending the war. The fight on the Selle in October saw 42nd (East Lancashire) Division, without tanks, attack and defeat a high-quality German division, pushing it back by means of infantry and artillery. The action was one of a number that showed the war was effectively over, and influenced the German High Command to recommend that fighting should finish before destruction reached home territory.

From the point of view of this study the crucial questions are whether the British Army of 1918 can be considered a 'conscript army', and whether such distinction suggests that the performance of its troops can be thought to have become 'better' or 'worse' in combat. Traditionally, a line has been drawn before and after the battle of the Somme (1 July–18 November 1916), and inference taken that men who were compelled to serve fought less well than those who volunteered. Even during the war there was a bias against the conscript in that volunteers were frequently perceived as braver or more patriotic than the pressed. Since 1970, however, research has come to question this view. In the 1970s, Martin Middlebrook concluded from a sample of 100 correspondents that just over half had arrived on the Western Front in 1917 and early 1918, the remainder having first arrived between 1914 and the end of 1916. This was suggestive of the British Army facing the 1918 Spring Offensive still being roughly half volunteers, though a mere 2 per cent were 'Old Contemptibles' of 1914 (Middlebrook 1978: 83). Recently, Alison Hine (2018: 156–70) determined that 40 per cent were still volunteers as late as the Battle of the Selle (17–25 October 1918): this would

indicate that the British Army, even at the time of the Armistice, was not a genuine 'conscript army'.



British soldiers with fixed bayonets take the surrender of a German machine-gunner, Croisilles, 1917 or 1918. One suspects this incident has been restaged for the camera, with the German safely disarmed and waist belt removed, before this re-emergence from the concrete pillbox. (The Print Collector/Print Collector/Getty Images)

Aftermath

The developments of combat in 1918 cast a long shadow over an entire century. Infantry sections and platoons of 1939 bore remarkable similarities to those in use at the end of World War I, commonly containing a mix of weaponry including at least one automatic weapon. Mortars continued to be attached to infantry formations, whether or not trenches were present, and field fortifications became commonplace, even if not in continuous lines. Cavalry ceased to be battle-winning instruments of the charge, and now acted mainly in secondary theatres and generally as a form of mounted infantry. In the British instance, cavalrymen eventually became raw the material for a 'Royal Armoured Corps' alongside the Royal Tank Regiment. Traditionalists mourned the dwindling of the mounted arm; modernists pushed for general mechanization. A number of German mounted units were repurposed as reconnaissance units in which cars, armoured cars and motorcycles replaced horses. While a general revulsion against them saw poison gases almost disappear from the battlefield, anti-gas measures remained, as did flamethrowers, barbed wire, mines and virtually everything else present in war in 1918.



Clad in field caps and unbuttoned greatcoats and with bayonets fixed to their rifles, these despondent-looking German troops make their final retreat from France, late 1918. (© CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)



These German prisoners were photographed on 18 April 1918. (The Print Collector/Print Collector/Getty Images)

A surprising amount of the ‘infantry battle of 1918’ even survives to the present day, notably attacks covered by night, smoke or fog, and movement

under supporting fire from automatic weapons or artillery. The use of grenades to clear enemy strongpoints and trenches, heavily camouflaged snipers and coordinated movement involving tanks and ‘dismounting’ personnel to attack, are just some of the elements we continue to see on battlefields today.



Members of the 20th Hussars, Christmas 1918. (@csp archive/Alamy Stock Photo)

UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

German

The three-battalion regiment remained a standard of German infantry organization in 1918 with battalions numbered I, II and III. Three such regiments made up a nine-battalion 'triangular' division. There were four numbered companies per battalion and three *Züge* (platoons) per company. The *Zug* was made up of four *Korporalschaften* each led by an NCO, and two *Gruppen* (squads) each led by a *Gefreiter* (senior private) made up the *Korporalschaft*.

Early in the war, 1,000-strong battalions were led by an *Oberstleutnant* or a *Major*, with a 13th *Maschinengewehr-Kompagnie* of six guns in the regiment as normal. By 1918, many battalions were operating at a 'trench strength' of about 600, and frequently these were commanded by a *Hauptmann* (captain). Platoons, previously led by a *Leutnant*, were now sometimes commanded by deputy officers, or senior NCOs. Acting at one level above nominal rank became quite normal, as did the use of reserve and *Landwehr* officers, even in elite regiments.

Firepower was maintained both by increasing the number of MG 08-equipped machine-gun companies per regiment, and by deploying MG 08/15 light machine guns in ordinary infantry companies. With six MG 08/15s per company and one or more MG 08 companies per battalion, upwards of 80 machine guns with a regiment was perfectly normal in the latter part of the war. Mortars were also allotted as standard to infantry battalions, commonly eight small *Granatenwerfer*, and four light *Minenwerfer* by 1918. Telescopic sights equipped about three snipers per company.

Stoß (shock) and *Sturm* (storm) units, which had appeared as early as 1916, became increasingly common, and could be parts of an existing battalion or regiment, or attached to a formation from *Sturmabteilung*, divisional or army resources. Three-weapon flamethrower detachments, and pairs of anti-tank rifles were also

added to quite a few regiments in 1918, with Bergmann MP 18 submachine guns also seeing limited use at the end of the war (Cron 2006: *passim*).

British

Like the Germans, the British started the war with 1,000-man battalions, each having four companies, usually designated A, B, C and D though some were lettered W, X, Y and Z. Four platoons led by junior officers made up the company, and four 'sections', each of about 8–10 men and led by a junior NCO, formed the platoon. Majors or captains commanded companies, with a lieutenant-colonel leading the battalion. Individual battalions usually served separately from others of the same regiment, with infantry brigades reduced from four to three battalions in 1918.

Officers were increasingly devoted to specialist tasks, and 'temporary' officers became increasingly common. Battalions were often led by a temporary lieutenant-colonel or a major. Two sections of each platoon were devoted to bombers and rifle bombers by early 1917, and several types of grenade were issued. As of 1917, platoons were defined as 28–44 men in strength. Vickers machine guns were withdrawn from the infantry to create companies of the Machine Gun Corps, and Lewis light machine guns were increased from two per infantry company in 1916, to at least one per platoon in 1918.

In 1914, each British cavalry regiment had 549 all ranks in three squadrons of four troops each, the regimental commander being a lieutenant-colonel; squadron leaders were majors or captains, and troop leaders captains or lieutenants. Cavalry regiments were commonly deployed in brigades or divisions, a cavalry brigade having three regiments. Initially, cavalry regiments were supported by a pair of Maxim guns, but in 1916 these were replaced by Hotchkiss light machine guns, in a machine-gun troop. Many cavalry regiments fought dismounted in 1918. When working dismounted, infantry terminology was often adopted with the men forming 'platoons' and 'companies', sometimes grouped in a 'battalion' or 'dismounted brigade'. These were numerically weaker than infantry formations, and given officer

shortages majors now often stood in as cavalry regiment commanders.

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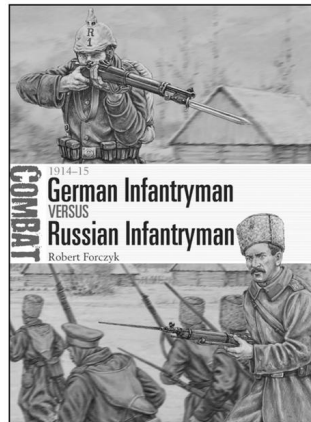
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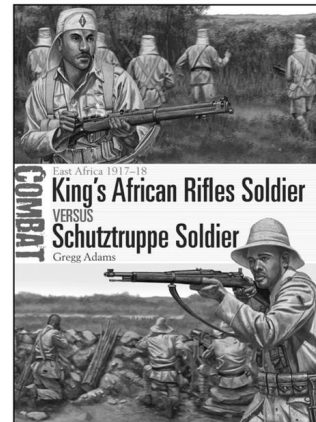
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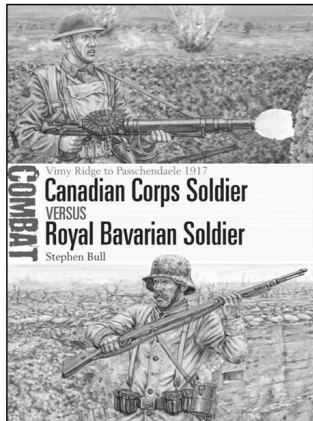
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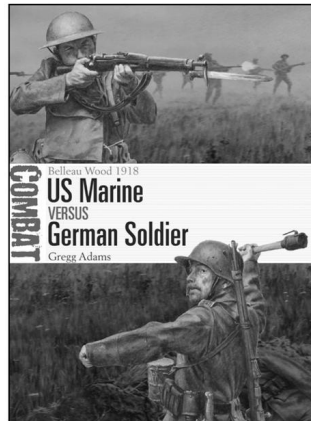
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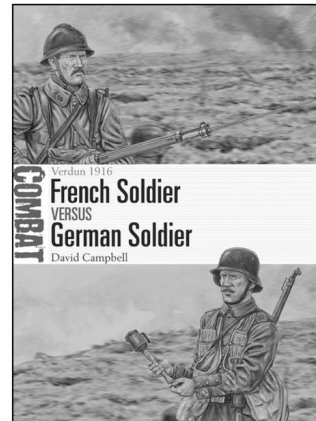
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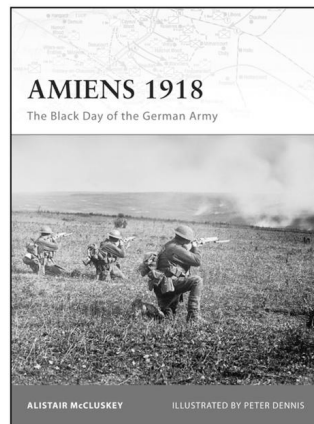


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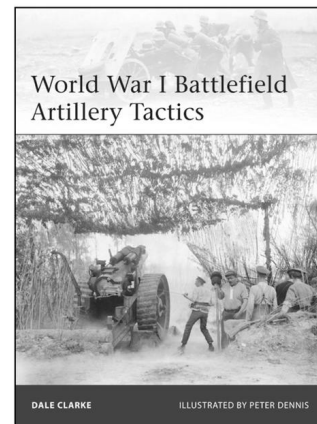
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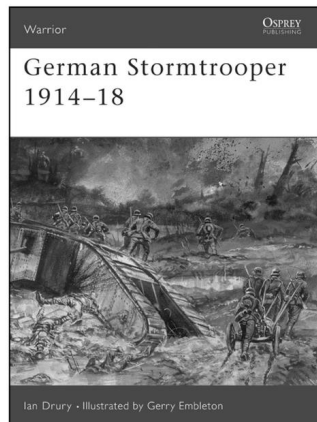
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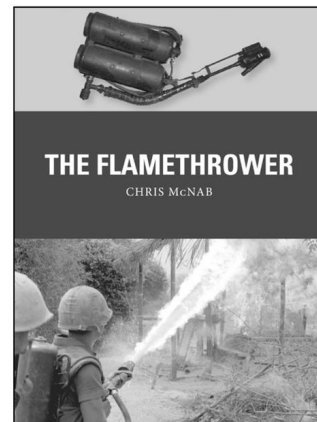
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